

Interview with Kenneth Yates

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

KENNETH YATES

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Q: Today is March 20, 1997. This is an interview with Ken Yates being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Ken, could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

YATES: I was born in New London, Connecticut on the 10th of November, 1940. I began with the Second World War. My father was a salesman. He had the eastern part of Connecticut for Sunshine Biscuits and sold cookies. At the time I was born, my mother was not working, but when I got a little older, she entered the workforce and we became a two-income family. I grew up in Mystic, Connecticut, which is a small seaport town.

Q: Whaling town.

YATES: Yes. The whaling museum was right across the street from where I grew up. I used to go over the railing and wander around the museum. It was almost abandoned and wasn't much then. They had the Charles Morgan, an old whaling ship. As a child, my father played on the Charles Morgan when it was a derelict wreck in New Bedford harbor, so we had a family tie to that boat. The Mystic Marine Museum consisted of a reconstructed shipyard with supporting buildings, including a rope-walk, a ship's chandlery, a sail loft, church, apothecary, school, and a variety of other period buildings including

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homes. Each building had been disassembled at its original site, the pieces numbered and recorded, and then reassembled in Mystic. For example, the old original New York Yacht Club Building was brought to Mystic.

Today, the educational facilities have been expanded but the basic museum was there at the time. Now it costs a high price for a ticket, but then nobody cared if the locals went in and out. I wandered around for many hours. I suspect my interest in Asia became firmly rooted at this time. The collection included a lot of Chinese artifacts, because the whaling ships left the east coast and sailed around the Horn and up into the Pacific where they spent years in the whaling grounds there. China was a coaling station and a place for water and fresh vegetables, so I learned a little bit about history and got a little sense of the rest of the world by jumping over the fence. For example, the ships had rocks in the bottom of the hulls for ballast, but when in Canton (Guangzhou) or similar Chinese ports, they took the rocks out and substituted blue and white pottery which was cheap in China but brought a good price back in New England. A lot of the blue and white Chinese ware that shows up in antique shops in the area probably made its trip to America as replacement ballast.

Q: Where did you go to school?

YATES: I went to a small town high school in Stonington and graduated in 1958. Mystic was then, as now, only a village divided between the towns of Stonington and Groton. Since I lived on the Stonington side of the Mystic River, I went to Stonington High School. I was part of the group that was post-sputnik.

Q: Will you explain "post-sputnik"?

YATES: That was when the Russians put up their first satellite, that little beeping grapefruit that circled the earth and made such a splash. All patriotic Americans then wanted to become engineers. I was a member of the civil air patrol, of the Boy Scout Explorers, and most other civic youth groups that were popular at the time such as the 4-H clubs. I

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was the local cadet commander in the civil air patrol and had maxed out on the science portions of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests, so I was given a strong nudge to become an engineer. I looked around for engineering schools including MIT, Stevens, and the smaller Clarkson College of Technology.

My choice was Clarkson in Potsdam, NY, a small, pretty good engineering college, where I soon found myself working 16-18 hours a day in study. You couldn't read a newspaper, listen to the radio (television wasn't such a big deal at that time), or have a social life. It was a slide rule on the hip and a constant grind of math, physics, and chemistry. My life consisted of classes all day, study at night, as much sleep as I could get, and then early rising to study in the dorm cafeteria until the breakfast crowd forced me out. I was stimulated by the science and confused by the math. It wasn't long before the boredom with the math and the frustration with seemingly overly picky profs, who would not even allow erasures in work that was turned in, for me to burn out in my first year.

To give some variety to life, I became part of a church group and even sang in the choir. There was a small Episcopalian church on a little island in the middle of the river that divided the two parts of the Clarkson campus. Each morning on the way to classes all the students had to pass over that island and usually by the wisecracking priest sitting on the steps of the rectory. During the mild hazing that went on during the first weeks at school, the priest would sit on those steps and jeer as the embarrassed freshmen paraded by. There was one particular onerous custom of 'backwards day' when all Freshmen had to wear all items of clothing, shirts, pants, belts, an even the foolish little beanie that was part of the freshman's trials, backward. That is save for shoes and socks. Of course, you also had to walk backwards wherever you went.

To this spectacle, the priest would heckle "Are you going to take that?" "Are you men or mice?" There was some irritation on the part of the upper-classmen with the clerical interference, and there was a rumor that the school had even placed pressure on the church to make him stop interfering with school rituals. Perhaps his independence and

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scorn for the foolishness of the custom increased my appreciation of his presence and the church. I had been an acolyte in the local Episcopal Church in Mystic where my parents belonged. My mother was an occasional soloist for the church. In fact, she had earned a bit of money hiring out as a soloist to a variety of the churches in the area to augment the less professional choirs.

As a kid, I recall being dragged around on Sundays, while my father delivered and then picked up my mother at her soloist duties. I rarely attended the churches where she sang, but on the Sundays that she had no work, we attended the Episcopal Church in Mystic. There I served as an acolyte, helping out with the service and with the priest (we called him minister) during communion or carrying the cross during the procession which began and ended the service. At one time or another, a career in the ministry crossed my mind but never stayed long.

This renegade, rough priest asked me one day what was the matter. I told him that I didn't like what I was doing. He said, "If you don't like what you are doing, why don't you quit?" I said, "If I quit, what am I going to do?" My father had gone into private business for himself, and it hadn't worked out, so there was not much money to be had at home. He said, "Then, if you can't make up your mind, go join the Army." I gave it some thought, walking across the bridge back to my dormitory on that very cold night, staring for a long time at the black night river. By the time I got back to the dorm, I had decided to quit after my freshman year and join the military. At the time, all able bodied males were expected to put in their time in the military service. While I was deferred for the time I spent in college, as soon as I came off full-time study, I would be subject to the draft. Enlistment would be preferable to the draft, since you could choose a field and receive training. I spent three years in the U.S. Army.

Q: 1958-61?

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YATES: Yes. Although I had been a cadet commander in the Civil Air Patrol and had intended to pursue an aeronautical engineering career after the service, I enlisted in the Army and not the Air Force, because an Air Force enlistment would have meant a commitment of four years. The Army offered three years and a choice of what I would do. Since I had a year of college, the recruiter in New London said that I could enlist in the Army Security Agency and receive advanced training at such places as the Presidio Monterey, California for Russian language.

Q: I'm a graduate of the Presidio, too. I was in the Air Force from 1950-51, a year.

YATES: Well, I never got there. After Basic Training at Fort Dix in New Jersey, I moved to Fort Devens in Massachusetts and took the Army's language aptitude test and was about number eight in the large group that was tested at that time. They said, "Fine, you are in like Flynn. Get your gear together." When I went down to a preliminary session they had, I was told there was one problem. Only eight people could go. The first seven on the list were going to go, but the eighth could not, because some NCO had re-upped for the purpose of going to language school. While he was not among the top finalists, there was evidently greater priority given to someone with more stripes than I had, and he was bumped up to my place. So I never got to go the Presidio for Russian studies.

However, I got some Russian at Fort Devens, where I was assigned to training as a Traffic Analyst. Instead of being assigned to Asmara or some other isolated place where Russian linguists were needed, the Army sent me to Japan after almost a year of training. My job was classified at the time, but my 10 years of promised silence expired long ago. From our wire encircled operations building in the lonely outskirts of Chitose, we were listening to Soviet military units in the eastern part of Siberia.

Essentially, all I would do was to sit every morning at a desk and try to match up the wiring diagrams of the Russian military units assigned in the Far East and try to work out which units were which in the piles of intercepted radio traffic. Of course, almost all of the traffic

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was encrypted, so we were expected to first break as much of the code as possible and then determine what the unit was. Once we identified the units and began to decipher messages, we would package it up in a bale and send it back to NSA in Washington. All of the traffic was in Russian, but most of the work was call-sign identification or similar shorthand, and little linguistic skill was needed. It was kind of fun but not very taxing work. A lot of the traffic was impossible to break, but now and then, we would have a lapse into the clear and that would give us at least a start at deciphering the “one-time-page” that the whole theater was using for that day.

Q: Where were you stationed?

YATES: At Chitose on the island of Hokkaido in northern Japan. It was cold sometimes, but a very beautiful part of the country.

Q: You weren't stationed up at Wakanai?

YATES: That was Air Force. Army was at Chitose. Chitose was a former U.S. air base that had been turned over to the Japanese for their Air Self-Defense Forces. We were a tenant at their base, then called “Chit-1.” That portion of the base also served as a commercial airport for all of Hokkaido. When I was there, the U.S. troops were gradually turning over more portions of “Chit-1” and moving to new brick barracks at “Chit-2” southeast of the city and closer to the remotely located operations building which had a large adjacent antenna field.

Q: I spent some time at Misawa. Wakanai was sort of the Siberia of the Air Force. I was doing the same thing. But this was when the Korean war was just dying down.

YATES: I missed the Korean war but came close to involvement in the Vietnam war. Toward the end of my tour at Chitose, I was offered the chance to go to Saigon with an ASA(?) unit which had been promised a civilian clothing allowance, living in a hotel, and lots of chances to see Southeast Asia. Called “Operation White Birch,” it was very

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appealing. However, I had been saving some of my salary each month in what evidently was an illegal account in a Japanese bank in downtown Chitose. At the time there were limitations on the amount of Yen you could exchange, so I decided to open a Japanese bank account to accumulate enough cash to allow a grand trip around Japan toward the end of my tour.

Since going to Saigon would mean abandoning my plans to see Japan, I decided not to volunteer for "White Birch." That was lucky, since I later heard that those who went ended up in tents in the mud, wearing fatigues, and later some became among the first American casualties when a jeep in which they were riding struck a mine.

Hokkaido was fun. Pretty simple work. You did your job and got promoted and everything was fine. I ended up as a Spec (Specialist) 5 or buck sergeant. It was a reasonably honorable career.

Q: Tell me a little bit about life in Hokkaido, off base, off duty.

YATES: I spent a lot of time off-duty. When I was an analyst, there were about five of us on a "trick." You only worked day "tricks," and it was not terribly intense. One or two of us could cover the day's work in a couple of hours. So we worked out a schedule to allow us to take off when the work was done. I worked about three days a week and had time on my hands. Most of us who lived there for more than a couple of weeks and were not part of the units of "trick animals," (the poor souls who sat with headphones on and listened to code all night), usually had rooms in town which cost the equivalent of about \$15, the yen being worth 360 to the dollar. Some picked up girl friends and had a sort of family life in town; I didn't. Instead, I decided I wanted to see more of Japan and wandered up to Sapporo, the provincial capital of Hokkaido.

In Sapporo, the U.S. had an American Center run by John MacDonald, a USIA (United States Information Agency) officer who spent almost his entire Foreign Service career in Japan. He had a Japanese wife and spoke wonderful Japanese. He had marvelous

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contacts among labor groups in Japan since he played golf and sort of fell into that group. In later years, he was THE expert on labor because of his incredibly good contacts. John asked me what I was doing as an American wandering around the library. I replied, "Nothing much." He said, "Well, why don't you teach English?" I thought that would be a good idea and eventually ended up teaching three classes a week at the Sapporo USIS (United States Information Service) center. I had a junior high class, a class of junior college teachers, and then a general class of adults.

One very colorful character who came was Dr. Murakami, a medical doctor who was a Buddhist. He was a very strong Buddhist, who had an immense curiosity about religions of all stripes. He was deeply interested in Christianity, Shintoism, and studying languages. In his late 60s when he joined my class, he always carried a large, battered briefcase full of papers. A marvelous gentleman. He came to just about every class of mine that he could, except the student classes. I don't know if he learned much English, but he certainly was fun to have around.

This experience set me off on another track. I earlier mentioned the bank account I had in Chitose in preparation for a long trip around Japan. In almost two years of saving money, I accumulated enough to embark on a wandering of about 30 days, just the length of validity of a Japan National Railways pass and about as much leave time as I could earn. I even had a little stamp, a seal, to use to make my mark in my bank book when I made deposits. My name was "Ichiro Yamamoto," a sort of Japanese "Joe Smith." It was undoubtedly illegal according to the rules of the time, but at the time, the bank was happy to take my money. Little by little, I saved around \$1000 which was enough to take a 30 day trip around Japan. I bought a JNR (Japan National Railway) rail pass and a camera and got on the train. I spent 30 days wandering from city to city. If I liked a place, I stayed; if I didn't, I would get on a train and ride until I got tired or arrived someplace I wanted to see and then got off. I had studied Japanese at the University of Maryland, so I had enough Japanese to get around.

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On arrival at a railroad station, the first thing I would do would be to buy a Japanese map with bus routes on it, so I could tell what buses to take. I had a JNR guidebook which was a small encyclopedia on Japan. It had tissue thin pages and very small print, but it was a gold mine of information with plenty of maps. So between the JNR guidebook and the local bus map, I had pretty good information about the lay of the land. Then I would go outside the railroad station and get a cab. The driver would ask where I wanted to go and I would say, "Any place where it is cheap." I had allowed \$3 a night (about 1,000 Yen) which put me in some very run down places. Yet most of the time the taxi drivers got me to some very fine, small student hostel type place. In those days the Japanese inns were the cheapest places to stay. I had a ball.

I spent almost two weeks of my month in Kyoto. Kyoto at the time had street cars. At night, I could climb up on top of the ryokan and look over the city. Right next door to where I stayed was a maiko boarding place where the younger girls were training to become geisha. It was like a girls' school dormitory. Every night before they would go out, they would spend hours getting made up and then prior to going out, they would take a walk to get some air, to relax a bit before going to their parties. If you went out and sat on the little bridge over a stream, sure enough there were several maikos who came out for their air before going off in their cars. So this way, you could see them. Every night, I would go out and sit on the bridge, and they got to recognize me and would greet me. It was very enjoyable.

One night I was sitting on one side of the bridge, and a very expensive Japanese car pulled up on the other side of the bridge and stopped. Out of it got a younger man, kind of pudgy with a large amount of camera gear. He obviously knew that the maiko were going to come out and walk over the bridge. Without paying any attention to me, he got all set up with his cameras at the ready. Soon, one of the maiko came out and about the same time spotted the young man with the camera. She walked up on my side of the bridge and across from the nervous young man and his cameras. As she neared me seated in my

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accustomed place on the railing, she stopped and greeted me. “Konbanwa” she said with a little, polite bow. Of course, I responded “Konbanwa” and returned the bow.

She then walked away with a giggle. I looked across the bridge, and there was my Japanese friend with his mouth at full gape. The scene of a foreigner involved with a cultural icon was something he had been completely unprepared for. The incredibility of the scene had clearly overloaded his reason, and he had forgotten all about his pictures. Recovering a bit, he was very frustrated with his lapse and most unhappy. All things ended well, however, since the maiko, on her return, stopped and let him take some of the lost pictures. He departed happily. Over the all-too-few days I spent observing these nightly strolls, the maiko of the school became distantly acquainted with the strange foreigner with the short haircut. Eventually, they gave me their small and unique calling cards. Unlike the usual business cards, they were smaller and featured only their names in cursive Japanese “kana” in bright pastel colors. I still keep them.

One afternoon, I decided to pay a call on my often noisy neighbors. I was interested in the social aspect of this and what went on in the boarding house next door. Often in the evenings, I would climb up to the roof of the ryokan to view the sunset over the western hills of Kyoto and watch night creep in. Particularly before the maiko would go off to their evening entertainments, they would be scrambling and chattering like all teenage girls, raising a fuss and destroying whatever solitude I had on the roof.

So one afternoon I went next door and entered the entry hall, the genkan, and knocked on the inner shoji, a door with rice paper covering the wooden lattice, and said, “Hi, I’m your neighbor.” The head mistress of the school came to the door and was instantly mistrustful of my motives. Foreigners are not commonly visitors to maiko schools, I assumed, and I tried to assure her that I was merely curious about how the school operated, where the students came from and why, and what the study was like.

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The lady of the house was appropriately suspicious, but after a bit of prodding, evidently decided that I was probably harmless and, perhaps reluctantly, admitted me to sit and watch as one of the maiko put on her evening makeup. My halting Japanese was sufficient to make small talk as the cultural experience unfolded before my eyes. I spent no more than about thirty minutes making small talk while the maiko had her hair fixed in the classical style and had the special makeup applied. The students were essentially just kids from the country, about 15, 16 or 17 years old, and all intended to become full geisha in time. In the old tradition, the geisha of Japan were not prostitutes but courtesans. They sang, danced, and helped restaurant customers relax and enjoy themselves.

Degradation into various forms of prostitution came later on, as geisha sought a more lucrative arrangement with their usually wealthy clients who sometimes became infatuated with one or another of the geisha who entertained them. Perhaps that is natural when you place generally poor girls with rich and often bored men. Geisha could acquire rich patrons who eventually took them as mistresses and thus assured them of a financially secure future or at least gave them the backing to open their own restaurants or entertainment houses as they got older and no longer were as attractive to the clientele.

Those in the maiko training school were trying to follow the original concept of the maiko and spent years in training, learning the songs, dances, instruments, and performances that were a part of the usual repertory. In these performances, the maiko were distinguished by the wearing of the long obi, a sash that goes around the Japanese kimono but has long tails that reach almost to the ground. This was the mark of a maiko or someone who is unmarried. The older or married geisha wore an obi without tails and wrapped in a sort of square of brocade neatly tucked above the hips.

After about 45 minutes of this cultural experience, I heard a commotion in the entryway, and sure enough, there was my landlady, very agitated and wanting to know what I was doing there. She had become rather motherly after my first week staying in her ryokan. She was upset that I would have the brass to walk next door and bang on the door of

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this school. She said, "You must leave this place immediately. This is no place for an American GI." This, of course, was true, so I did. But my all too short foray into the school next door was a fascinating bit of insight into an aspect of Japanese culture, rarely visible to foreigners and probably many Japanese.

Kyoto is still the cultural capital of Japan. But at that time, it possessed an aura of the ancient Japan only seen in romantic novels or on the screen. You could see people wearing Japanese clothing and "geta" (footwear) outside. When it rained, the city quieted down to a soft murmur. You would look out the window and see rain falling on dark wood buildings on a street with no cars, people in kimono walking along with the old oil paper umbrellas. It was beautiful. There were several parts of the city that were most attractive. At Kyomizudera, a Buddhist temple sited on the side of a hill overlooking the city, you could still grasp the remarkable inventiveness of the old wooden architecture. At Kokedera, the moss temple that contained thousands of varieties of rare mosses, was still not overrun with tourists; eventually, it had to be closed because of the danger of destroying the very mosses that made it important.

One of my most memorable walks in Kyoto was on a quiet Sunday morning when I decided to walk the considerable distance to the Nijo castle in the morning before breakfast. The city was still getting in motion, but the sun was up and very warm despite the early hour. On a side street near the castle, hunger finally got the better of me, and I entered a small coffee shop, looking for something to eat. All that was available was "morning coffee" which consisted of a raw egg yolk dropped into very strong and hot coffee. Along with this unique beverage was served toast in the very thick slices in which Japanese bread was traditionally cut. When the bread is toasted, the outside is golden brown and crisp, but the center remains very white and soft. Sitting in the small coffee shop as the owner busied himself outside sweeping the side walk, stirring my "morning coffee" with the miniature spoon like that served with a demitasse, and crunching the crisp-

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soft toast, I knew one of the most peaceful moments I can remember. I very much enjoyed Kyoto.

The trip, of course, was full of significance for me. I traveled all the way down as far as Nagasaki and Kumamoto. This trip really got my feet into Asia. Japan at the time was poor. People forget, even the Japanese forget, that Japan after the war was not in very good economic shape. This was particularly true in Hokkaido, where the economy was primarily agricultural and modern society had not made significant inroads. The GI chapel in Chitose had organized a small work group of three of us to take a “deuce and a half,” a two and a half ton army truck, to drive over the mountains to help some farmers build a pig barn on the western coast of Hokkaido.

In the mid-1950s, Soviet trawlers had begun to fan out from Vladivostok, and they were vacuuming the sea of fish. A small fleet of boats would be organized about a large factory ship. They would drop large drag nets and essentially sweep the sea. They were doing this right off the coast of Hokkaido. Japanese fishermen with their old wooden boats, used for centuries, would go out and find there were no fish. They were literally starving. There was nothing there for them to eat.

A Texas oil millionaire came in with a program which I believe still exists today, where he went around the world trying to find places where people needed help. He wouldn't give them money but gave them pigs. Two or three dozen pigs would be given to a village. The farmers in return would have to give the first litter of pigs to the rest of the community for distribution in pairs. Of course, a single litter of pigs consisted of many piglets, so in a short time, pigs were everywhere. It was an enormous success. The former fishermen got pork to eat, and the pigs were easy to maintain, but they had to have some place where they could breed and raise the piglets. So a few of us took a truck up over the mountains to a place called Setana, on the west coast of Hokkaido. We helped them lug stones up a hill where they were going to build a barn. They needed the stone for the foundation.

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We did that for about a week, living there in a little house that was built near where the barn was to be built. We had a marvelous time, because there were young Japanese volunteers there also. We would work, meet, and sleep together. We GIs were put upstairs in the loft. I will never forget the first night I went up to the loft, and there was nobody there, so we put our sleeping bags on the floor and went to sleep. The next morning I woke up to noise and commotion and discovered there was a girl in a sleeping bag asleep next to me. The whole place was full of kids. We hadn't heard them come in, we were so tired. This was quite a sensation for a young GI but great fun.

Q: You left Japan in 1961. Where did you go?

YATES: During my trip around Japan, I often stayed more than one day in a place, as it was fun to find a seat somewhere and watch people. In Kyoto while at a temple, I heard a commotion outside and wandered over to see what was going on. There was an older American and a woman I took to be his wife having a loud argument with a taxi driver. At least, he was having an argument. Perhaps in the conviction that simply raising his voice would bring about greater understanding, the man was almost shouting and a small crowd of curious Japanese had gathered. His wife was ineffectually trying to calm him down.

Since I spoke some Japanese, I went over and pulled the wife aside and asked if I could help. She said, "Please do, this is getting out of hand." I asked what they wanted, and she said just to get back to their hotel. The taxi driver had no idea what her husband was talking about. I explained to the driver where they wanted to go and he said, "Fine, no problem." They got into the cab and before leaving, asked me to join them for lunch. Never quick to turn down a free meal to augment my budget, I went with them.

It turned out that he was a professor emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania. He asked me what plans I had and what I would do after leaving the Army. I said I wasn't sure but knew that it probably would have something to do with the study of Asia. I had been thinking of the Foreign Service. He asked, "Why don't you go to Penn?" That sounded

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good to me. Anything like that would be attractive, but I did not have the kind of money that would permit such a school. He replied, "Well, I have a friend who works in a bank. If you come to Philadelphia, I will give my friend a call, and he probably will give you a job for support while you attend school."

So after I got back home, I borrowed the family car and drove to Philadelphia and looked up my new friends. Professor Foster Nix was a physics professor at the university and had a role in the Manhattan Project, which developed the nuclear bomb that ended the war in the Pacific. The Nix's lived in West Chester, outside of Philadelphia. There on the top of a hill, they had built their home with a greenhouse as part of the very comfortable lifestyle they shared. On several occasions, I recall the remarkable salads Mrs. Nix would prepare for lunch made from the freshly harvested lettuce straight from that greenhouse. The professor, true to his word called his friend, who turned out to be a Vice President at First Pennsylvania, and I got a job in the Transit Department processing checks on the midnight shift.

After returning the family car to Connecticut, I returned to Philadelphia by bus and began living at the Y, an awful place that harbored a strange assortment of young hopefuls and old hopeless. But it was only a few blocks from the 15th and Chestnut offices of First Pennsylvania. Meals were often to be had at a classic greasy-spoon across the street from the Y. There, you could get almost edible meatloaf, lumpy mashed potatoes, and coffee into which you could pour as much sugar as would dissolve and thereby get enough calories to sustain a day of work and study. I began working the midnight shift and enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania where I could take both day and evening classes. Sleep had to be grabbed in the remaining hours.

I knew what I wanted to do; I wanted to get into the Foreign Service. John MacDonald, the USIS Branch Public Affairs Officer Sapporo, had suggested that joining the Foreign Service was something I should consider. Since I had become very much wrapped up in the history, culture, and people of Japan, I thought that was a good idea. Naturally, I

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knew nothing of the process or requirements of entry. When I quizzed John about how I might approach that, he said, "You take an exam which is kind of a muddle of everything." I asked how I might study for it. He replied, "There is one thing that you could do. Everyday read the New York Times. If you do that, in a couple of years you will be ready for the Foreign Service exam."

Accepting his advice, I tried to do this along with my work at Penn. It took me six years to get a four year degree, since for most of the time, I could only study part time. I worked the night shift, so I could take classes in the morning and afternoon. I couldn't take a full course load, but I got through.

Q: What was your major?

YATES: International affairs. It was just what I wanted. Still, I made a few bone-headed mistakes. For example, I decided to take Russian, because I had Russian before and it seemed like the logical thing to do. It was a summer course, very intensive, a full year in eight weeks. I blew it completely. They switched the course time on me. It was supposed to be from 9-12 every day, which was barely possible since I got out of work around 8:00. But then they made it 8-11 to accommodate the instructor. This meant I was missing an hour a day of class and I was falling asleep in the warm summer classroom to boot.

I was flunking so badly that before my mid-terms I went to my instructor and asked what I should do. He suggested I get a tutor, so I found a younger girl who agreed to tutor me at no charge. So weekends and whenever I had the time, I got on my Vespa motor scooter and headed out to the Main Line where my tutor lived in an enormous house. Her father was in business and clearly was very well off.

I worked hard but had little hope. Nonetheless, after almost completely blowing away the mid-term, I stumbled through the rest of the course and got a B on the final. My instructor was dumbfounded, for he knew that I had little command of the Russian language. Still, he could neither give me a B or fail me, so he proposed a compromise. If I promised never to

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study Russian again, he would give me a C. I thought that was good enough to get me out of a precarious situation with minimal effect on my grade point average and accepted.

During my time at Penn I was a computer operator at the bank. I started in the Transit Department, but after only a few months there, came to the conclusion that the grinding work did not give me any time to study, unlike others who were in the Data Processing Department where they sat around monitoring computers and had plenty of time to read or do other things. Since few wished to work straight midnight hours when the Bank did most of its computer work, I was able to work a transfer and began work in the world of computers.

Q: Computers were in their infancy then.

YATES: Yes. They had vacuum tubes, and the computer filled a very large room. We had a resident engineer who slept in a little room on the side. Whenever we had a problem, he would come out with a screwdriver in his pocket. A common way of finding a glitch in the computer was to open all the compartments and look at the vacuum tubes. He would mount a test program and then run his screwdriver clinking across the tubes until the computer stopped. He would pull out the tube that caused the stop, put in a new tube, close the computer doors, and go back to sleep. That was how you fixed the computer in those days.

It was a computer over which the operator really had full control. You could even step through each separate line of the program with special switches that executed one step at a time. This was useful in diagnosing problems. You also had full banks of neon lamps which showed you the contents of buffersread buffers, memory buffers, print buffers, etc. Everything that the computer could do for you was fully displayed. You could stop the computer with a stop switch and see what the computer was doing by reading the machine language buffers. The operator could manually program the computer by changing the values of the neons in the command buffer.

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With the special machine language commands at the console, you could move tape drives. If you had a read error, you could attempt to read a sequence of blocks on the tape and try to discover what was wrong. If the error was really gross, the operator had the option to go to the problem drive, lift out the 3/4" tape from the drive and place it in a holder on which a solution containing iron filings was poured. Once the fluid evaporated, the iron filings would be left in a pattern revealing the contents of the record on the tape. If it could be read manually with the error obvious, those contents could be inserted in the appropriate buffer through the neons on the control console, the tape re-positioned, the program backed up and stepped along that segment, and the processing resumed. That was how you fixed things in those days. It was a lot of fun.

One difficulty was that I was there during a period of transition. I was an operator who ran the two Burroughs 220 computers, the one that First Pennsylvania used in processing its own work and the one that about a dozen correspondent banks in the Philadelphia area used. To keep up with the times and the competition, the bank had replaced the old, vacuum tube Burroughs 220 with a new multiprocessing system in another building out near the 30th Street railroad station on Market Street. So all the computer operators, supervisors, and all the big shots who ran things wanted to be out in the new facility. Since I was the junior of the crowd, they left me with the two old computers - and all of the work. All my plans for extra time to study while the machines worked were lost. Keeping two mainframe computers fed with needed input tapes, supplying the two high-speed drum printers with paper for the output journals, and working out intermittent problems with the aging computers kept me hopping. I ran all the bank's work every night for about six months.

A consequence was, when they finally closed the old facility and moved to the new one, I knew everything there was to know about that old computer and the programs. So when they needed someone to fix problems, they had to come to me. Eventually, I moved up and became the supervisor on the midnight shift. Actually, I was making more money than

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I did when I later entered the Foreign Service. I had to take a cut of about \$2000 a year when I came into the Foreign Service. However, I didn't want to be a computer operator for the rest of my life.

Q: While you were at Penn was there any opportunity for you to learn Japanese?

YATES: Yes. I am not a great language student. You would think someone who has been in the Foreign Service as long as I have been would be a marvelous language student, but I am not. My three languages now are Japanese, Korean, and Chinese, which is kind of strange for somebody who is not adept at languages. The Foreign Service Institute scale labels these three languages among the most difficult of any major world languages for the English speaker to learn. Korean is number one on that list, and naturally, was the one I eventually had the greatest experience in. Japanese and Chinese are also among the top few, mixed in with Arabic and some of the Southeast Asian Languages.

At the end of my time at Penn, I remembered the words of wisdom that John MacDonald had given me about the exam. In addition to his instruction to keep reading the New York Times from front to back, he counseled, "Whatever you do, when you want to come into the Foreign Service, don't wait until you think you are ready; take the exam several times for practice." So in my final year as an undergraduate at Penn, I signed up for the Foreign Service exam for practice.

I took it in a big room at Temple University. I told myself it was just a practice run. It seemed okay. In fact, I enjoyed it and felt it was kind of fun. My immediate plans were to go on for an MA in graduate school at Penn, working nights and taking courses during the day. But after entering graduate school on a path toward at least an MA, I got a letter saying "Congratulations! You have passed the Foreign Service exam." I went back to school, and one of my instructors, who was also taking the Foreign Service exam, came up to me and asked how I did. I said, "Okay. I passed it." He said, "You did? Oh, well." He didn't.

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There were two of us from Penn that year that passed the exam. I was scheduled for an oral exam in front of a panel in Washington. At the time, I didn't have a way to get down, so the other guy offered to give me a ride. He was a very fine historian, a very smart guy, in the graduate program taking European history. We went down together and took the exam.

Q: Could you talk about the oral exam?

YATES: It was 1967, and there isn't a lot that I remember about it. There were four examiners at a table and another off to the side. Their technique was to set you at ease by asking about your family and home. Then, they would quiz you on an area in which you claimed some expertise. Of course, for me that was Japan and Asia. The technique was to push and push and push. Keep asking more and more complicated questions, until you could no longer give a knowledgeable answer. I was told later that the point was how well you did when you ran out of intellectual resources. What the examiners sought was how well you did in controlling the situation. I didn't know that at the time. But it was still kind of fun, because I was still in graduate school and had no intention of coming into the Foreign Service at that point.

I finished the oral and went out, and my friend who had preceded me in the exam was sitting in the waiting area. He asked me how I did, and I said I didn't know. We waited for a while for the results, since the examiners made their determination on the spot and let you know before you left. It turned out that I passed and he didn't. So as far as I know, I was the only Penn graduate that year to join the Foreign Service. I have had no regrets. The Foreign Service has had its moments of frustration, but the work is worth it. The Foreign Service had a special purpose then, and it is probably needed now more than ever. World relationships have grown more complex and difficult to assess now that the earlier division of the world into two Cold-War camps is no longer available to make it easy to determine friend and enemy. People are needed on the ground around the world to keep informed on the real situation in those nations that have the potential to destabilize the international

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order. The old Foreign Service demanded something of those who would make it a career that is different from the demands of the Foreign Service today. It was more like entering the priesthood or a monastery. You were expected to sacrifice; you were expected to give up things. What you gave up was contact with relatives, a settled life, and any hope of becoming rich.

Q: Or even really developing a stack, a good house, etc.

YATES: You didn't have any of that. You couldn't even own a car of your own choice at the time I joined. When I graduated, I decided I was going to buy something that I really wanted, a sports car, one of the first Nissan sports cars that was imported into the US. At the time, it was called a "Nissan Fairlady," a canary-yellow two-seater with an aluminum engine and a fold-down top with a tonneau to protect you if it was cold and you had the top down. I loved that car, but I had to sell it because I wasn't allowed to own a sports car and take an assignment to Korea. I had to sell that at a loss. So it was an expensive experience for me. But I was convinced that joining the Foreign Service was a good thing and something of value to do with my life.

Q: You came in when?

YATES: In August, 1967.

Q: Was there a choice of going to USIA or the State Department at that time?

YATES: When you took the exam, you had to indicate in a block at the top of the exam whether you wanted to join the Department of State or USIA. Because of my time with John MacDonald, there was never any question but that I would join USIA. At the time, however, all had to take a common Foreign Service exam and come into the Service as regular Foreign Service Officers.

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Q: Could you describe the composition and maybe the outlook of your basic training class, the A100 course?

YATES: That was an experience. There were eleven of us going into USIA in that course and maybe another 40 going into State. The USIA group would meet in USIA headquarters at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, across from what used to be the Roger Smith Hotel, and then join the State contingent for common training in Rosslyn where FSI was then located. It was an interesting class. We obviously had renegades in it, people who were not what you think of as a government employee with a white shirt and dark suit. Most of the renegades were in the USIA crowd. I remember one of the State guys was Teddy Roosevelt III, a former Navy seal and himself a rebel of sorts.

We had a problem in that class. When we got toward the end of it, the last week or two, our instructors passed out very thick loose-leaf binders of consular material to study and be qualified as Consular Officers. Those of us in the USIA group got together and said we did not come in here to become Consular Officers and felt our time would be better spent back at USIA preparing for our assignments. There was a big fight over that. Dean Firth was Dean at FSI at the time. Fred Chapin was the counselor for our group who took it as a personal affront that we should be so rude and crude as to reject something that had been planned for us by those who assumedly knew better. We had a fight on our hands. Together, we caucused and decided that we would stand together and refuse to do the consular course.

It was a selfish goal since we had heard that earlier USIA Junior Officers had arrived at Post only to be assigned to roundly disrespected Consular work, stamping visas and interviewing applicants. We knew if we did not take the Consular Course, we would not be authorized to serve as Consular Officers and thereby would have to be left with USIA, regardless of the pressing needs in the consular sections. Our choice was to go back to

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USIA and complete our A100 course there. We had not joined the Foreign Service to do consular work.

The rebellion and the practices it called into question went all the way to the highest levels of the agency, and we had to go see Dean Firth in his office. After much strain and red-faced argument, particularly by our course monitor, the decision was made to allow us to opt out of the Consular Officer study. Perhaps no one had the patience to sit for the difficulty of an inter-agency fight and decided the easiest decision was to let the rebels go back to their own agency. We went triumphantly back to USIA and never looked back. The irony of this is, of course, that I had to take the consular course later when consular work became part of my responsibilities in North Korea.

But Fred Chapin never forgave me for that, or anyone else in that group. We got black marks on our careers by very negative remarks in his evaluation of us at this very early stage of our budding careers. Fred deemed such rebellion unseemly for future Foreign Service Officers, but we held it as a banner of spunk and creativity, both of which we had already decided were uncharacteristic of the State officers whom we had observed in our orientation sessions. We openly speculated over who among our peers in the A-100 course would drop out of State soon because of the confining, stilted nature of their chosen profession.

Q: I'm really surprised at this. It makes eminent sense that there is a point when you tap things off when you have two distinct groups like that.

YATES: I think Fred's point was that those were the orders, and you don't fight the system. If you are going to be good Foreign Service Officers, you are going to have to know how to take orders. He was really very, very angry.

He showed up later in my career as head of the State Department inspection team that looked at, not my operation, but the operation of the Department in Reykjavik when I was

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there. Fred was gentleman enough not to mention the earlier confrontation, and I had no real indication that he remembered. But I did.

Q: What were you getting about the role of USIA at that time in 1967? What was the spirit and role and goal of USIA then?

YATES: I mentioned that as a GI in Japan, I had taught English in Sapporo at the American Cultural Center three times a week. One of the things that I learned from that experience was that the Japanese, at least, didn't have much of an idea of what Americans were like but had an intense desire to know more. Save for the American Center, there was really no place where they could easily come to a clear understanding.

In Hokkaido, there is a famous story of a man named William Clark, which I guess influenced me as well. William Clark was a government employee with the Department of Agriculture back in the 1800s who was assigned to a team to go to Japan to give advice to the Japanese. Characteristically, the Japanese were not interested in such unsolicited advice, so when he got to Tokyo, they had no interest in him and sent him away to Hokkaido, Japan's frontier. He went to Sapporo and essentially had nothing to do. Dissatisfied with wasting his time in a job that went nowhere, Clark set about making a personal contribution.

What he did was to found a university on the basis of what a New England college looked like. Today, the campus of the University of Hokkaido looks like a New England town, because the buildings, the layout, and the concept of the university owe everything to William Clark. He also taught English while he was there. He had a class of 18 students, as I understand it, that he taught for only about a year.

His class was all males, of course, and they were young and ambitious. He was in Japan for only about 18 months, but he taught English, founded the University of Hokkaido and had an influence on the thinking that went into laying out the city. It was, on its own merits, a remarkable record of accomplishment. Thus, Sapporo was one of the few provincial

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capitals of Japan that was laid out in a regular way except what was destroyed in the war and rebuilt later. His short stay at an end, he left Sapporo and hiked back south to get a boat to the main island of Honshu and then back to Massachusetts. He left his students in a little valley called Hiroshima Dani, where today there is a little statue of him. His parting words to his students was "Boys be ambitious." That has come down in Hokkaido folklore to this time.

A few of them really were ambitious, or at least took his advice to heart. Of the 18 students to whom he taught English, four became very senior officials in the Japanese government, senior advisors called ginro. According to the folk tales, they were among the few who strongly advised against the Japanese adventure in China. They vehemently opposed Japanese actions in the Pacific against the Americans. Had there been one, two, or three more William Clarks in Japan at that time and had there been more ginro that had strongly urged against the Japanese aggressiveness of the time, there might have been no incursions into Korea, Manchuria, or China or at least involvement of a significantly less aggressive nature, and we may not have fought the Second World War in the Pacific.

The story encouraged a conviction that if you had enough people to talk about America, not selling an image but accurately telling people about America, much difficulty might have been avoided. If the Japanese in the 1930s and 1940s had understood about this country, they probably would not have fought against us, probably would not have attacked Pearl Harbor, nor would they have directly drawn us into the war. What that would have done to history I can't say, but it certainly would have saved a lot of lives. That convinced me, at least, that there was something valuable in maintaining contact with other people, even on a casual basis, because a person who understands another person and his culture probably won't shoot at him at some point later.

Q: Did you find that this was the spirit that was within USIA at that time?

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YATES: That was my motivation for joining. Others had other reasons. USIA was a kind of conglomerate of different kinds of people. There were bureaucrats and adventurers, who having lived abroad, didn't want to come back to the US. There were press people who were looking for something else to do. USIA at the time, was really a mixed group. When I entered USIA, my first assignment was to Korea. I had come to Washington with Japanese as my principal language claim. There was a requirement of at least a minimal competence in a language before you got promoted. So I was put into Japanese language training to get me off that probation. In about three months, I got a 2 - 2 releasing me from the language probation.

There weren't any assignments available in Japan, so they put me in Korea. I knew little about Korea but was interested in it and happy to go. It was a fine move; I never objected to it at all. So I switched from Japanese grammar on a Friday afternoon to elementary Korean on the next Monday morning. I had six months of training before going to Seoul. At that time, Seoul was a different sort of place for USIA. We made movies in Korea and had four branch posts which still has the old "Mopix" vans as standard equipment. These were old Willys jeep trucks with roof racks which could be used for mounting a 16mm projector for outdoor movie shows. This past year those branches have all been closed, a sorry testament to bean counters making what should have been thoughtful policy decisions. Thus has the Foreign Service changed.

Q: Where were they?

YATES: Kwangju, where I eventually became PAO, as well as Pusan, Taegu and Seoul. It was an important program. Korea was a poor country; the people were much poorer than those in Hokkaido that I knew in Japan, but hard working and tough. There wasn't much in material wealth. The southern part of Korea is principally agricultural. After a year in Seoul as a JOT, I was initially assigned to Kwangju.

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Q: I would like to do each chunk at a time. How did you find studying Korean? You say you have trouble studying languages.

YATES: I was one of the older people in the class, having been to college for one year, three years in the army and six years getting a four-year degree at Penn and then going into graduate school after that. So I was getting on. I was in my late '20s, but others in my class were younger. Language isn't easy at any age, but it sure does get an awful lot more difficult as you progress down life's path. Japanese was basically easy for me since I had lived in Japan and had studied it at Penn. I got my 2,2 and got out of it. But when I switched to Korean, it was back to zero again. Japanese helped a little bit, but even then, Koreans didn't use Chinese characters very much. I had enjoyed Chinese characters a lot. While I was in Chitose with the Army and not otherwise teaching English in Sapporo, on my other off-duty-hours, I took some classes in "sosho," (grass) writing of Japanese characters in a special style. I learned a lot about Japanese discipline, esthetics, and culture in those classes.

Unfortunately, Korean at the time was taught in Roman character equivalents. I guess the theory was that thick-skulled Americans couldn't understand squiggly little writing or something equally indefensible.

Q: Actually there are only 28 characters, so it is not that big...

YATES: It is a syllabary, not an alphabet actually. It is grouped in these clusters of syllables, so you get syllables forming words instead of the single "kana" pronunciation in Japanese. It is more difficult. Phonetic values change, based on their relationship to the following syllable, making it more complicated to learn. At the time, Korean was, and still is I guess, considered the most difficult language for an English-speaking person to learn. The reason for that is, it has Chinese characters and a very complicated grammar. Someone once told me there were 2,000 separate verb forms for each verb. Whether that

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is true or not I don't know, but the multiplicity of verb forms is one aspect that makes the language more difficult.

For example, newspaper language is different from the spoken language, and within the spoken language, there are different levels. If you are my classmate, I speak to you one way. If you are one class ahead of me in school, I would have a slightly different twist to my verb endings. At home, you speak to your child one way; to your father, another way; your wife, a different way; and your brother, in a fourth way. There are different levels of language. That doesn't mean they are completely dissimilar, but there are enough differences so that you can make errors very quickly. English-speaking missionaries who spent their entire lives in Korea are famous as the butt of Korean jokes, because they would make errors that sounded all right to foreigners but to Koreans gave rise to a great deal of amusement. I don't know anyone who is not a native Korean who really speaks Korean. Perhaps that is true for most difficult languages. You have to limit your expectations when you begin such a study.

Q: Let's start with the time you were in Seoul. You were there from when to when?

YATES: From the fall of 1968 for almost a year.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

YATES: Bill Porter.

Q: Did you have any dealings with him or any feel for him?

YATES: Not when I was in Seoul but when I was in Kwangju. Bill Porter was a very, very smart and capable ambassador. He was intensely interested in Korea and spoke Korean. He was interested enough in the process, so that when he ran his embassy, he made sure he had all of us who were in the field - the Branch Public Affairs Officers, a smattering of USAID people who were gradually being withdrawn, and the Consular Officer who was in

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Pusan - come to Seoul every three months for a de-briefing on what was going on in the provinces. It was nice for a young officer to have that kind of serious attention from the boss.

He would listen carefully and absorb what we had to say. He had very good knowledge of what was going on in Korea. He was a good friend of Cardinal Kim, who was one of the opposition people in Taegu. The ambassador had a robin's-egg-blue carryall which you couldn't miss, since his was the only one like it in Korea. He would take only his driver and suddenly leave Seoul, often driving the carryall himself with his driver as passenger. No one knew where he was going. If he wished, he would use the radiotelephone installed in the carryall, but of course, could keep it off and be fully out of touch. This drove the Korean security police crazy. The only reason I would know he was in Kwangju was because his driver and my driver were old buddies for some reason or other.

Every time the ambassador would come to Kwangju, his driver would bring the carryall to our American Center to park it. I would walk into the office in the morning, see the bright blue carryall, and know the ambassador was in town. Usually within an hour or so, I would receive a call from the local police, saying they understood the ambassador was in town. I would respond that I couldn't confirm or deny it. They would ask what he was doing. "He doesn't confide in me," I would say. "Where is he going?" "Well, I don't know." "When is he leaving?" "I don't know that either." They couldn't approach him, because that would be getting out of channels, but they wanted to make sure they knew where he was, what he was up to, and, more importantly, who he was seeing. He was a really nice, smart guy.

On the other hand, he gave his political section a terrible time. When we got finished with one of the field officer's quarterly briefings, we would leave his office, only to be intercepted by the staff of the Political Section, anxious to hear what was on the ambassador's mind. That would lead to our debrief for the Political Section.

Q: In 1968, how would you describe the political and economic situation in Korea?

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YATES: It was unrecognizable. I remember clearly my ride in from the Kimpo airport on my arrival in Korea. I was met by the PAO (Public Affairs Officer), Dan Moore. He picked me up in his nice black Chevy, or whatever it was. It was dusk when I got in and very dark by the time I had processed through customs and been received by Dan. We proceeded on the highway into the capital, and as we got nearer and nearer to the center of the city, I noticed there weren't any lights. It was pitch black. There were no cars. There was nothing. I was riding in a void. I said, "Dan, what is this?" He said, "Well, at night time, it gets pretty dark in Seoul, because there isn't much power." And, sure enough, I didn't see any light in Korea until we got almost to the Seoul railroad station in the heart of Seoul. On the way in, near the U.S. Army's South Post compound, there were a few light bulbs in windows, mostly stores. No street lights or visible signs of people. I began to worry about what I was getting into.

The next day, the streets were very busy. But Korea was very poor and undeveloped. Of course, there was no subway, and I saw only a few, overcrowded busses. It was very much an agrarian society and had suffered almost total destruction in the Korean War. They were just beginning to pull themselves together. A person going to Korea today would have no idea that it was so poor such a short time ago.

Q: I first saw Korea in 1952 as a GI in Seoul. There were no trees, rugged hills.

YATES: Fifteen years later, there had been some rebuilding, although there was only one major tourist hotel in the city.

Q: What were you getting from the Political Section and in briefings about the political situation at that time?

YATES: Park Chung Hee was President and had been for more than five or six years. He was in full control. It was very much a military society, although it wasn't oppressive. The image of the Park Chung Hee government is a little bit distorted in this country. He is

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remembered by some as a “tin horn” military dictator. I don't think that ever was really the case.

I had spent my undergraduate work on East Asia and knew a little bit about Park Chung Hee. I never met him, although I came close. We had set up an exhibit on the Apollo landing on the moon and the related space program, and he was at the opening. I did not meet him personally or even shake his hand. My only impressions were from his passing close by. He was very short, with a crisp military bearing. From my academic work on his life, I believe that he was basically honest. He got that from the Japanese, because he was schooled in their ethics of the time.

Q: He was in the Japanese army wasn't he?

YATES: Not quite, he was in the Manchurian army which was run by the Japanese. I know a fair amount about Park, because when I went back for an MA, I did my thesis on him. I fault our intelligence services for not devoting the time and energy to do a better job of looking at foreign leaders. It was always a source of frustration to me that our senior leadership did not have the benefit of careful biographic data on their counterparts. What I had seen was mostly the most cursory impressions, much like what you read in news accounts. More important is a better understanding of the elements of the training and experience that serve as the foundation for attitude and prejudice.

Park Chung Hee was a country boy, basically a teacher who was given a break by the Japanese. His later biographies are not very good. He was recruited into the Manchurian army. At that time, Manchukuo was a Japanese state in Manchuria. The basis of the state, as the Japanese promoted it, was a gathering of the five nations that comprised Manchuria. The problem for the Japanese was that in order to sustain the image of a real nation of five nations, they had to have input from all of the member groups, including Koreans. Park Chung Hee was picked as a Korean who could be trusted. He was very good at martial arts.

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Evidently his martial arts teacher was Japanese, and saw something in Park that they wanted. He went up to the military academy operated by the Japanese in Harbin (the present day Changchun), graduated, and spent another two years in Zama at the Japanese academy where he had more classes. He then went back to Manchuria and became a lieutenant, fighting bandits in north China. When the Japanese lost the war, Park Chung Hee somehow got himself to Beijing and was then repatriated to Korea. He then went on the rocks for a while. Opposition folk claim that he turned into a drunk and a wastrel, but I doubt that, given his character. He was always fond of drink, even the otherwise lower class Makkoli, a sort of rice beer. His brother was active in the communist movement and Park Chung Hee was eventually arrested and was sentenced to death by court.

Q: Would this have been under the Syngman Rhee government?

YATES: Yes. He was sentenced to death for collusion with the enemy who were the communists of the time. His brother died fighting some place (actually, he was executed). Park Chung Hee had been known by a Japanese name during the period when the Japanese had forced all Koreans to adopt Japanese names in an effort to forcibly integrate Korea as a province of Japan. Chung Il Kwon, a general in the new Korean army that emerged after the Second World War, had also been in the Manchurian army. Like Park Chung Hee, he had served in the Manchukuo Army but had studied for four full years at the Japanese Military Academy in Tokyo. He pulled Park Chung Hee out of the fire by arranging an agreement for him to cooperate. He allegedly turned over the names of everybody who was among the conspirators on the communist side to save his neck. Again, that is a little bit out of character, but possible. He became part of the civilian intelligence apparatus of the Korean army and because of his Japanese military background, he later entered the Korean military academy when the academy got underway. He was in the fourth class.

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Q: When did he get his commission?

YATES: I would have to look that up.

Q: Was this before the war?

YATES: Yes, Park Chung Hee received his commission before the war. He served during the war in a variety of jobs, essentially logistical. He was not good at English but knew the Japanese manual of arms. When the Korean army was founded, there was nothing to guide them on what to do, so strangely enough, they used the Japanese manual of arms for their training. Park Chung Hee then worked his way up the ranks. He didn't have a very good career, and he always seem to struggle. He rose to the colonel level and then languished there. I lived in the house where he once lived when he was head of the logistics command in Kwangju. It was rumored that he was living in the house at a point sometime after the war when the U.S. opened the American Cultural Center there. Since that house had been Japanese property before the war, it became Korean government property after the war and was among the sites made available to the U.S. for official use for a minimal amount of rent each year. I often wonder how much resentment of the Americans was instilled in the later President, since they expropriated his residence and forced him to leave. That property remained the residence of the BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer) up until the recent closing of the center.

Q: Have you any idea of his role during the Korean War?

YATES: No, I don't. I don't think he had one that had a command function where he would have been mentioned in the history books. At that time, his function appeared to be essentially support.

Q: One would think this was the defining time for anyone in the Korean army.

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YATES: The first couple of classes at the academy contained the ones who were very significant in the Korean conflict. He was behind that curve and was a junior person at that time, so he didn't have a command. Secondly, he did not particularly like Americans, and I think that attitude was demonstrated in the following years. He didn't like the way Americans acted. He detested the Korean generals who played golf and hobnobbed with the Americans, spoke English, and generally lorded it over those like himself who were, as he saw himself I am sure, good patriotic Koreans. His training in the Manchurian academy instilled in him some very distinct social principles. The unity of the people; the concept that if you are not for me, you are against me; the certainty of a rigid social order along military lines. This shows up later in his work in the "Saemaul Undong," the New Community Movement that emerged in the latter part of his administration. It was very similar to the kinds of things that were taught at the Manchurian academy.

However, he had a grasp of management, particularly in the way he used advisors. Hahm Byon Chun, whom I knew in Seoul, a professor at the university at the time, later became an advisor at the Blue House, an ambassador, and an important influence on Park Chung Hee as president.

Q: Blue House is the equivalent to our White House.

YATES: That's right. The heart of the Korean government. Prof. Hahm once told me that one of Park Chung Hee's strengths was the way he used his advisors. He read incessantly, mainly Japanese newspapers, and was very well versed in what was going on in the world. He would call advisors in regularly, but according to a specific ritual. Prof. Hahm told me that when he would go in, Park Chung Hee would ask specific questions, very carefully crafted questions, and never let on what his opinions were. He would simply absorb information and then thank the advisor very much. The next advisor would go in, and similar questions were asked. After Park had heard all the evidence, he consolidated

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all the information and made his decision. The advisors did not meet together and present him with a consensus report. Often they did not know who else was being consulted.

Park was able to maintain control for so long by using his advisors that way, and because he learned from the Americans. He had learned American skills in management in his duties as logistics officer in the Korean army. This was a very smart man, but a man who had very clear prejudices, including feelings of distance from Americans.

Q: When you got to the embassy in 1968, and this was a new country for you, what were you getting from your colleagues about the government there? What was the feeling towards both the government of Park Chung Hee and the situation in Korea at that time?

YATES: Most Americans were uncomfortable with Park, as he was with them. He was known as a dictator, having taken the government by force. He had become a civilian and done things that appeased the people to a degree. I think most people were focused on development at the time, though. It was the economic development of Korea that was the main thrust, not the political situation. Human rights were not a particularly popular thing in Korea, not an essential issue when compared with the larger questions of economic development.

On the other hand, women's affairs were a major element in our program efforts. We had a lot of programming to involve women in the community. Consumer protection was a big item. They got into a debate in USIA about where to draw the line when helping this kind of process along to what we termed at the time as "social engineering." Were we making a conscious effort to change Korea, or were we simply trying to help when people asked for assistance? That became controversial. We made a special effort to reduce intrusiveness into the Korean social situation, so we would avoid any possible future charge of "social engineering." That was not our business. Our business was to interpret America. We were not there to promote consumer protection but to promote an understanding of how Americans use consumer protection and make that knowledge

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available to Korean women, particularly, leaders who were interested in developing this to a greater extent in Korea; purity of food, the cleanliness of water, etc.

Q: Did we have women's programs that came out of the can from Washington?

YATES: This was something that we developed locally, because on our staff, we had a very dynamic local employee who was interested in that and she dragged us along. She subsequently became a very prominent woman leader in Korea and still is. The last time I was there, I saw her on television several times on expert panels, etc. She was a very good example of how an FSN (Foreign Service National) employee really can become a dynamic force in her own society.

Q: What was her name?

YATES: Lee Chung Sook, I believe.

Q: What was the feeling you were getting from your colleagues about the threat from the North?

YATES: The threat was palpable. I remember a reception, one of the first official functions I attended in Seoul, when we were all talking and suddenly we hear "boom!, boom!." The sounds were obviously not caused by firecrackers but heavy artillery. The entire room froze, and we wondered if this was the beginning of the war again. It turned out to be only South Korean army maneuvers, but the tension was always close to the surface in Seoul, only about 30 miles from the DMZ.

That is still the case. Just this past year when I was in Seoul, they had a celebration in town where they set off loud fireworks. You heard "boom" and the same question pops up after all these years. There is a constant threat. Thirty miles away, there is the sixth largest army in the world, poised to strike and threatening to do so. They have lived under this threat for 40 years. It is quite a psychological burden.

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Q: Did they have the 15th of the month air raid drill and all?

YATES: Yes, and they still do, sometimes observed more in the breach than in practice. Perhaps this relates to the general attitude of the younger people who did not experience the horror of the Korean War.

Q: I'm talking about in 1968.

YATES: Oh, sure. But what I was relating was not part of these drills. I am commenting on it in terms of the psychology of the people at the time. We had a person on our staff who said he still, after all those years following the Korean War, had nightmares. His nightmare was always the same. He was hiding under the floorboards of his house and above him were North Korean troops looking for him. He would wake up in a sweat every time. There is still that kind of psychology.

Q: In USIA at that time, did the American missionaries play any particular role?

YATES: No.

Q: Were they used at all as purveyors of information?

YATES: No, never to my knowledge. In Kwangju, I knew some of the missionaries there, although not very well. All my dental work was done by an American dental missionary.

Q: Seven Day Adventist?

YATES: No, he was a Baptist, I think. They were medical missionaries and didn't do much preaching. He was there to teach Koreans how to do good dentistry, and he did a good job. I still have some of the caps he put on. I did a lot of work there with him. He was a very fine man. But no, the medical missionaries had nothing to do with us, and we wouldn't have anything to do with them on a professional level in the work we were engaged in.

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However, we had a bigger problem with Peace Corps volunteers, as at that time, young dynamic Americans were very anti-government because of the Vietnam war. They were quick to accuse. Some Peace Corps volunteers were telling their Korean hosts that those USIA people were really CIA. That was a hard thing for us to deal with in Korea, because Koreans are very easily convinced of conspiracies and because the volunteers living with them every day had developed a strong sense of confidence and trust. The Peace Corps Volunteers' views simply confirmed for their Korean hosts what they always suspected. We really had to "talk turkey" to some of these Peace Corps Volunteers who were doing us severe harm in the rural areas of Korea and in the cities where they taught English.

Q: When you arrived there, what was USIA trying to do? One thing was to explain the United States, but beyond that, there was pushing American policy and a high priority on that was Vietnam and our involvement there. What were you up to?

YATES: Vietnam was never a problem for us in Korea. Remember Koreans were part of our effort in Vietnam. They gave it their full support. They had experienced, first hand, the perfidy and atrocities of the communist armies and needed no convincing to give our efforts in Vietnam full support. In fact, the White Horse Division of the Korean Army that went to Vietnam while I was in Korea, was famous for its effectiveness with the Vietnamese.

There is a story that after they arrived they were attacked by a North Vietnamese contingent, and the Koreans captured a number of them. In order to hold the prisoners without an extra amount of manpower, they took copper wire and a big needle and strung them together through their checks with this copper wire like a string of fish and put a Korean soldier on one end with the wire in his hand. In that manner, one soldier could control a very large number of North Vietnamese prisoners. In our Army, a GI would be run out of the service for doing this. However, the word got around among the Viet Cong that these were not Western, long-nose types with all these fancy ideas about human rights;

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these were Asians with a different view. So the Viet Cong soon learned not to engage the Koreans in battle, since the consequences could be severe.

With the ensuing and rapid pacification of their area, the Koreans became quickly bored with their Vietnam experience and would spend their time shopping to the PX to buy television sets and other inexpensive consumer goods to take home with them at the end of their tours. The North Vietnamese scrupulously avoided contact with the Korean troops.

There was a Korean military academy in Kwangju, and when I was there, we used to watch them come through the city while in training. They would double time twenty miles to the exercise grounds and double time twenty miles back after a whole day of training. You would see them running through the streets and there wasn't an ounce of fat on them. They were very, very tough. This is what the North Vietnamese were running up against in the war there. I can understand why they didn't want any part of the Korean forces.

Q: What were you trying to do?

YATES: The mission had a variety of aspects to it. The major one was to interpret American policy. For example, towards the end of my tour in Kwangju, Nixon visited China, and the Koreans were absolutely convinced that Nixon had sold them down the river. The Shanghai Communique was the only thing we could point to with clarity to convince them we had not. Videotape was a big part of my program and was key to the solution of this special issue.

We copied off-air from Japanese television a tape of the Nixon-Zhou En-lai toasts, the banquet, and the speeches and translated them doing a voice-over. I had a transportable video unit consisting of videotape recorder, a transformer, and a television set. One of my local employees, a driver, and I would show this video at every possible university, business club, school, civic organization, governmental organization, and anybody else I could find, if I could gather three or four in a room together to see that tape. This was to discredit the Korean government's version of what we were doing in China. That was

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direct support of policy and was one of those rare instances in USIA where we had a clear and unambiguous problem on policy that we could do something with. After about two weeks of very intensive programming around the country, we essentially discredited the Korean government's persistent claim that the U.S. government had ignored Korea and was making secret agreements with the Chinese about policy on the Korean peninsula.

Q: Was it a direct collision with the Korean government, saying these Americans had sold us out?

YATES: Yes. At that time, the Korean press was essentially a handmaiden of the government. We were getting hit by editorials, by political opinion columns, and by slanted news coverage saying, "Aha! The Americans are double dealing us and ignoring our interests to their own advantage." They really were not. I saw governors and mayors and went to the Korean CIA headquarters once, showing these tapes that showed the real story. And it worked. It was a countrywide effort with all the branches involved. We hit them with everything we had and were very effective, I think, in getting Korean opinion turned around. However, the Korean government was still uneasy with what we had done. I suspect it was Park Chung Hee, himself, who was really ticked off.

Q: This was around 1971 or so?

YATES: Yes.

Q: One talks in Japanese terms about the Nixon "shokku". How did the opening of China go down when word came out that Henry Kissinger had gone to China?

YATES: That was what I was talking about. That was a shock. The Koreans weren't involved and didn't know about it. It was as much a surprise to them as it was to everybody else. The shokku that occurred in Tokyo had reverberations in Seoul as well. But what we had to do was, quickly and without any kind of hesitation, put out information on exactly

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what had happened; that was effective. The repercussions of the disinformation from the Korean government did not last very long. I don't know what happened in Japan.

Q: In 1969, you went to Kwangju?

YATES: Yes.

Q: And you were there until when?

YATES: Until 1972.

Q: What was the situation in Kwangju, away from the capital?

YATES: This was my best tour ever in the Foreign Service. It turned out that the AID (Agency for International Development) people were pulling out as I arrived, so I was the only American official left in the two southwestern provinces of Korea.

Q: You had just arrived at Kwangju.

YATES: Kwangju was in the agrarian part of South Korea. A major rice producer, rape seed, sesame, and that kind of stuff. Basic Korean food items. There also was good fishing off the coast. I had two provinces, Cholla Namdo (South Cholla) and Cholla Pukdo (North Cholla). We had a fairly large American military base at Kunsan in Cholla Pukdo (it is still there) and a contingency base in Kwangju with a full Colonel as its commander. It was there in case there were a war when it would become a rear area landing base and logistics transfer point. It had the POL on hand...

Q: Pol being petroleum, oil, and lubricants.

YATES: Right. On hand in case it was needed for actual combat. So the Kwangju Air Force base was essentially a ROK air force base, or Republic of Korea air force base which would also serve as a contingency base for American forces, should we have to

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move them in. I think that contingency is still present, although the American forces no longer reside. There must have been about 200 Americans at the time I was in Kwangju as BPAO.

Q: Did you find a difference in attitude in talking to people in Kwangju and out in both provinces ?

YATES: From the rest of the country?

Q: Yes, the outlook.

YATES: Absolutely. Kwangju is traditionally the opposition capital of Korea. Korea historically was divided into three parts. Korguryo in the north, the hunters and gatherers, as it were, and Paekche and Silla which are the two southern principal kingdoms during the highpoint in Korean culture. The region containing the Cholla provinces was called the kingdom of Paekche. Paekche had close ties to Japan and was considered a cultural capital of the larger Korean society. It also had ties to China. If you look at a map, you will see how close the Shantung Peninsula of China is to the Korean coast.

The southern part of Korea was especially affected by China, for some reason. When I traveled in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, the language there sounded like Korean, but of course wasn't; it was Cantonese. The Paekche and Silla people did not get along. At the time I was in Kwangju, there was a sign above a tunnel that goes through the Chiri mountain range which divided Honam (Cholla Namdo and Cholla Pukdo), the old Paekche, from the Kyongsando region (originally the Silla kingdom) that says, "This is where the language changes."

The language, of course, is all Korean, and the nation is supposed to be the most homogenous country in the world, but there are a lot of differences there. There is the difference in attitude and language among other things. The Honam provinces of the southwest provinces traditionally have felt discriminated against. They spoke a dialect

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which was not standard. The Kwangju revolt of 1918 was one of the first civil revolts against the Japanese. The Tonghak rebellion found its roots in Kwangju and the Silla area. The most prominent people of the opposition today are from the southern area, including Kim Dae Jung who is from Mokpo, the port city southwest of Kwangju.

While I was there, they built the first four lane limited access highway from Seoul to Pusan. It ran through Taegu, which is in the Kyongsando region. It came down through areas outside of the Honam region. Therefore, much of the intense industrial development of the time occurred on the east coast of Korea because of this new highway. This was much to the chagrin of the people in the Honam region who felt they were being ignored. They finally put through a double lane "limited access" highway down to Kwangju and then over to Pusan. When I first arrived, all roads outside of Kwangju and a couple of the other larger cities of the region were gravel, unimproved gravel. I spent lots of time on the road between Chonju, the capital of Cholla Pukdo, and Kwangju, where I lived.

Q: I forgot to ask, did you get married while in Korea?

YATES: Yes, I married a girl from Kwangju. For several semesters, I taught American Studies at Chosun University where my wife studied and at Chonnam University, the national university in Cholla Namdo. She was not a part of my classes.

The two classes I taught were particularly interesting, to me at least. I was asked to teach by American studies professors, because they wanted to have their students get a little bit of the feeling of how American classes are taught. They didn't feel comfortable in that effort, so I agreed to teach a couple of semesters in each school. According to school rules, I would have to be paid for it. However, being a government employee, the money I earned went into a scholarship fund for students at each school.

I had an assistant teacher, particularly since the classes were in English. I taught about what kind of country this is, the geography, the economy, etc. It was kind of fun, because I was able to experiment with the teaching environment that the Korean students were

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accustomed to. In the normal Korean classroom, on the entry of the professor or instructor, the class would stand up. The class monitor would then report the class attendance to the instructor, who would then move to the front of the room where there was a podium and deliver a lecture for almost exactly fifty minutes. At the end of the lecture, he would close his book and leave. That was the way Korean classes worked. The procedure was to take notes and then be examined on the information given in the lectures. There was very little outside reading or individual research by students.

I decided that instead of that essentially Confucian relationship between instructor and students, we would do it straight American style. When I would enter the classroom and the class would stand up, I would ask them to sit down. I wouldn't stand in front or take an attendance report. They were told if they did not attend, it would be all right with me, but that I could not be sure that they would do well on the exams. I would walk around the room, write on the blackboard, ask them questions from the back of the room, assign reading, try to get others than the class leader to respond in class, and generally caused great consternation.

One of the most difficult shocks for the classes was the habit of asking questions of the students who were not class monitors. Just about always, the class monitors would answer the questions. The reason for that was that in the traditional system, the students did not respond to questions from the instructor since the teacher was the font of all wisdom and it was the student's duty to absorb the teachings that were offered. How could a teacher question the students? They did not have the knowledge unless first imparted by the teacher, who assuredly already knew the answers. Tests were written exams at the end of the course. Thinking independently was not required, even discouraged.

If I had the brashness to ask a student a question directly, I would be told politely to ask the monitor who speaks for the class. This direct interrogation on the material, of course, was to indicate who had completed the assigned reading, but always came as a shock to

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those who were unaccustomed to speaking up. This was particularly true for the girls, who were always quiet. Yet this was to be taught in the American mode, so I persisted.

I also assigned reading, which caused some concern among the inferior students, who certainly did not want such assignments. Professors always rehearsed to the classes what was going to be on the exams, so reading on one's own outside of class was a waste of time. To make matters worse, I assigned reading out of a text book which I laboriously xeroxed and passed out. Some students did the extra reading, catching the wave as it were, to learn a bit about the "American way." Some even tried to respond, albeit shyly and hesitantly, to my questions. Rarely would anyone ask questions, so I would press, "Okay, who has a question?" All that usually prompted was staring at the floor.

I remember my first math class in Clarkson. With a brand new syllabus, the instructor walked into the room and put his book down on the table, saying, "You were all assigned reading for this first class. I assume you have all read it. Are there any questions?" There was no response. He continued, "Okay, I guess everyone knows what is required for tonight, I will see you tomorrow" and took his book and walked off. That was the end of the class. I didn't go to that extreme in my lectures in Kwangju, but I did walk into the class and said, "Okay, now, you have all read the assignment, what do you think about it?" That caused enormous stress for the students.

I couldn't push it too far, but it was fun to do. I said that at the end of the class there was going to be an exam like they had in their other courses, so they understood that. But I also asked them to do a paper. They asked what was a paper? I said that you go out and do some research. You pick a topic, go to the library, find materials, read about it, think, and give me three or four pages in a paper. The language of the paper could be in Korean. It did not have to be in English. I told them if they produced a paper, they would automatically get a one letter increase in their grade, regardless of the quality of the paper. Therefore if a student got a B on the exam, he or she would get an A in the course. Well,

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that went down heavy. I got some questions, but I didn't get even one paper. I tried and tried to get them to write.

A couple of the smarter students in the class came to me at the American Center, which I ran, and said, "What do I do?" I would say, "Read books or magazines if you want and find a topic". "What topic?" "You pick something that interests you." It was hard for them to understand that they had to think independently, which, of course, was the purpose of the exercise. A few students made an effort to get started, but to my knowledge, nobody ever finished a paper. This was Korea in 1972, but all is different now. American techniques are more prevalent, particularly in the courses taught by professors who have received advanced degrees in the US. I would suppose that the students still feel uncomfortable with the system, since the high schools remain more closely identified with the traditional way of teaching. The "American way" of challenging the students with a professor who is more a guide to an investigation of a subject than an expert whose knowledge is only to be emulated and repeated in the exam. That is the Confucian tradition most commonly accepted throughout Asia.

Q: Did you follow any of these students who would go to graduate school in the United States, or would any of them do this?

YATES: We did know that Korean students going to the United States had desperate troubles. I knew some of them in Philadelphia when I was there. The bank I worked at hired a student going to Temple University, and he was having desperate troubles. He could hardly speak English. There was an occasional suicide of a Korean student who just got too far behind and couldn't manage. A student going abroad to study from Korea was considered the best, the cream of the crop, and the families usually sold the cow, as it were, to get them to go and put a lot of pride and energy, money, and resources into these students. When they got to the United States, they couldn't survive because of the difference in the educational systems. So rather than go home in shame as a failure, some simply remained in the U.S. and others even resorted to suicide.

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It was hard on the students and on the schools. The instructors at these two schools understood that there was trouble. One of the purposes of my class was to give an inkling of the kind of experience they would have in an American university. Whether it worked or not, I can't say, and I have not tried to see if any of my struggling students ever made it to the U.S. for study. I would think not, simply because one course in an American style of teaching is insufficient to become really sensitized to a method which is so alien to the practices of the time.

Q: My experience in Korea was in 1976-79, and I was running the consular section. The students were going as graduate students to some of the very best schools, but I wasn't getting much feedback on how they were doing.

YATES: If they were in the sciences or math, there may not have been a problem, but it was in the liberal arts area where Korean students found the most difficulties.

Q: I would think so, because I recall one of the young women in my file room came to me and wanted some advice. Her brother was going to go abroad to school, he was an engineer, and she wanted to know which ones he should apply to for scholarships. One school was called MIT and the other was Cal Tech. I said that they were the two top schools in the United States, probably in the world, so either one would be fine. I was impressed, because I had run consular sections in other parts of the world where the students were often going to what I would call rinky-dink colleges which were designed really to take money from foreigners. But these were first rate. But it was in the sciences.

YATES: The Korean system of education, as with Asian educational systems which use rote memorization in general, is more attuned to the kind of mathematical proofs and memorization that is necessary in order to be successful in the sciences. Many don't know English, but your skills are as good in Korean as in English when mathematics is concerned. You don't need a lot of language. There is a special international argot, anyway, to the discipline that you probably will pick up in your country. But when you get

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into reading historical treatises, expressing opinion, doing original research on a topic, those methods were not common in Korea. The Korean system was not to take a Korean student and show him or her how to learn. It was to teach the student what he or she should know, and when they became professors, they would take that knowledge and expand it more. They would have to learn the fundamentals from their predecessors first.

Of course, the Asian tradition of instruction also had good points that are too often overlooked in the West. For example, when I was in Kwangju, I had a good friend, Huh Baek Nyun, whose pen name was Yi Jae. He was an artist, a living national treasure of Korea. He produced magnificent work based on classical Chinese Southern Sung Dynasty principles of art. I would chat with him occasionally in his studio and once in a while, would take a new book on American art. He had long fingernails and would turn the pages very slowly. He would stop and look longer at a particular example, and you could tell he felt that particular picture was good, and usually it was. He had a very fine eye.

He was running an art school and had two sons. The younger son was a doctor and the older was with him to be trained by his father. I asked him how his students were? "Oh," he said, "they are not very good." "Why not, no talent?" "They are too impatient," he offered. "Young people don't understand. They think that you can take a brush and make art. They are wrong. It takes seven years to learn how to make a straight line with the brush. Seven years how to make a dot. After you have learned those two crafts, then you can learn how to make clouds that flow through the mountains, and that is another seven years. So after you know how to make a straight line, and after you know how to make a dot, and after you know how to make the clouds that run through the mountains, then you can begin to create art."

Q: Twenty-one years later!

YATES: That's right. What he was dramatically putting into perspective was that you have to learn the craft, and until you have it mastered, you cannot produce art. I have always

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taken that to heart, because I think that is a fundamental Asian view of things. A student goes to a master, sits at the feet of the master, and maybe in 20 or 30 years after studying with the master and mastering the craft, can then begin to create his own interpretation. Even then, he is still looking back at what has been done and principally repeating what he has been taught and learned at the feet of the master, before he, himself, could become a master. He doesn't even have the privilege of becoming a master until the very last days of his life. Sort of the upside down from the way we look at it now, with the idea that youth can carry the day and bring new ideas into things and create something superior to the old. That concept of endless progress is not an Asian concept. I think he had a point which showed in his criticism of the American art he saw in the books I would bring to him. He said that some of it showed promise while other examples were just junk and untutored. Until you have the skills, regardless of how good you are, it is not going to come out well. That was his important lesson of life.

Q: Did you find that Kwangju represented a seat of dissidence or dissent and were American ideas being used by the youth to see how to oppose the government? We certainly were in the period of great dissent in the United States the anti-Vietnam feelings, etc.

YATES: It was clearly a center of dissent. They felt wronged and not a part of the major stream of things going on in South Korea. Kwangju is also the most conservative part of the country, being agrarian. Conservative in the sense of looking back to the old and unwilling to give up the traditional. If you have a chance to see a portrayal of Korean culture such as the farmers' dances, that is all stuff that comes out of the south. It is the farmer based agrarian culture, which is at the heart of the Korean traditional culture.

The bureaucracy is in Seoul. That is where the later Yi Dynasty kings sat and was the administrative seat under the Japanese. But the real folk culture is in the south. You don't have a large bubble of pressure down there of modern change. You find a grudging non-acceptance of the bureaucrats up in Seoul running around in their fancy cars and playing

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golf while the folk of Honam suffered down on the farm, but they kept the traditional values. The Kwangju student revolt in 1980, of course, got out of hand and led to the later scandal and terrible trauma within the country. The students were unhappy. That doesn't mean they were unhappy in the sense that they could be seen as becoming Jeffersonian democrats. Students in Korea, I would argue, don't trust the older generation, but the result of their advocacy is not necessarily what we would see as one-man-one-vote. They have a more obscure reason for rebelling, mainly because I think they feel that certain groups in the society have an unfair advantage, so they see themselves as being left out.

Q: What I got some years later was that Park Chung Hee had made a very wise decision, sort of social engineering, in that he was not going to make the mistake so many dictators do and that is milk the farm of everything in order to make bread or rice cheap in the capital city. He was going to make sure that the farmers were receiving basically fair pay for what they were producing. Was this true?

YATES: I think that is a fair statement. Park Chung Hee was a product of a rural environment. His father was a middle level bureaucrat, but the former President was a small town boy who probably felt some of the traditional resentment of a villager against those sophisticated from the city. However, he was a great reader and that was one of his principal strengths. He read about other strong, authoritative leaders. Kemal Ataturk of Turkey was one of his idols, a strong leader. Nasser was also someone he had a favorable opinion of. There was also talk about de Gaulle as being among his pantheon, but that was less clear. I think it was unquestionable that he had a great deal of respect for Kemal Ataturk. Those are people who had agrarian reforms in their basic programs.

Park Chung Hee spent a lot of time on farm issues. He saw himself as a farm boy, and I think he understood, as Mao Zedong did in China, that the fundamental part of the country is agrarian. Of course, possibly owing to that prejudice, the industrial worker didn't do too well. Korean labor was generally underpaid for a long time and essentially was the way

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Korea made its economic leaps forward. There were vertically organized monopolies in Korea, the Chaebol, that dominated the country for a long time.

The Koreans are basically tough people. They have had a difficult history, having been walked on by the Chinese and Japanese and had to tough it out all along. Americans appeared on the scene after the defeat of the Japanese and became a presence in their society but were not going to be there permanently. Koreans expect the departure of the Americans will come at some point, although they don't want it right now. President Carter was going to pull us out, but the Koreans got upset about that.

Q: I was there at the time and it was a difficult time Yankee, don't go home just now!

YATES: An unusual message. The Koreans are not only tough but reluctantly understand to varying degrees that a lot of their chestnuts were pulled out of the fire because of the American willingness to fight against the communist North. Younger Koreans forget that, they don't learn much of their own history, particularly history starting with the Japanese occupation. Psychologically they want to forget that period of subjugation. It was an embarrassment and a terrible time that they would like to see go away. Iceland has the same feeling about the Danes and won't even talk about them because they were in control and that was an embarrassing period in their history. So the Koreans are reluctant to think much about the Japanese occupation period.

They don't like the Japanese for the suffering they received at the hands of their overlords for almost half a century and will continue to dislike the Japanese for the foreseeable future. In this, they are somewhat like the Chinese. The Japanese haven't quite got a clear understanding that such a feeling persists to the extent that it does, but none the less, that is the way Koreans feel. So they are missing an important part of their recent history, a basic part of their formative years as a modern nation.

Most Koreans blame the U.S. for the division of the peninsula. We ran into this all the time. Many think that the U.S. has a responsibility to put it back together again. That question is

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open to argument based on the post-WWII negotiations that began in Yalta, but I feel that is basically a false reading of history. The naked truth would reveal that nobody thought about it. Perhaps, that is an even worse insult: that nobody bothered to give serious consideration to Korea; it was an after-thought.

With the Japanese surrender, the American military was very reluctant to get involved in Korea. General Hodge was in the Philippines at the time and was deeply reluctant to accept the direct order to go to Korea. Americans knew little about Korea, and apart from a few missionaries, we had almost no expertise in the language or culture. In our post-war innocence, we had much to learn about the complexities of the responsibilities we inherited with the victory in the Pacific. Hodge rounded up as many experts, mostly missionaries, as he could find, and flew to Kimpo to receive the surrender from the Japanese who were fearful of having to surrender to their long-time rivals, the Russians. The story of that decision, to get to Seoul in response to pleas from the defeated Japanese, is one of the interesting side lights of the end of the war. Evidently the basic decision was made in the White House, with a few relatively junior policy makers and military (Dean Rusk, Marshall Green...) carrying the day.

I don't know whether that was a hurried and ill-considered decision or not, but had we demurred, it is likely that all of Korea would be communist today. Mistake or fortune, we were ignorant of Korea and its problems and really did not want to get involved. There was an effort in 1948 to unify the country with a UN vote, but the North pulled out of it. I don't think too many tears were shed in the South when the North pulled out. Korea is not a unified country, despite all the propaganda which says it is the most homogenous people in the world. They have very deep, historic antagonisms. The Paekche/Silla thing is only part of it. The Northerners have always been Northerners.

The split is something similar to divisions in the U.S. between the Yankees and the Dixiecrats. There is a split there, and it is going to take a couple hundred years for things to cool off. The Korean War didn't help it any. If we had fought the Civil War four or five

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years ago, maybe we would be able to understand the emotional scars more clearly today. I do not believe that the Koreans themselves fully understand these emotions, but they have this emotional thing in their stomachs yes, we must be united, we are all one nation, but not today. During most of the divided period, it was forbidden to teach about or study the North. Collections of materials about the North were kept under lock and key, and anyone attempting to learn about the North was subject to severe penalties under the National Security Law.

Q: Was there any discussion while you were there of what would happen with unification?

YATES: Not in the way it would be discussed today. In those days it was inconceivable because of their economies. The current discussion is that communism is dead, even in the North, and they are no longer the threat they were earlier. Certainly there remains an unambiguous military threat because of the enormous size of the North Korean military, almost three quarters of which is poised near the DMZ, ready to strike without warning. Yet there is no doubt that Southerners do not have the same fear of the ideology of communism eroding social stability there. That was not the case at the time I was in Kwangju.

At that time, there was a real fear of infiltration from the North of spies and saboteurs. There was an incident while I was there where somebody walked into a village and asked for a bank that had been in the town during the Japanese occupation. Villagers suspected that he was a former villager who had gone north and had recently been infiltrated back into the south. They shot and killed him. He was an outsider, but turned out to be just a guy who had moved to Japan and had come back looking for his old boyhood home. Unfortunately, he did not explain, nobody knew him, and he was taken as a spy. That illustrates the intensity of the feeling and the sense of insecurity at that time. Nonetheless, he should have known better than to mess around and not let people know who he was. He was a casualty of the nerves of an era. I do not think a similar incident would happen today, although we are not so many months past the submarine incident

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where Northerners successfully infiltrated into the South and were caught only when their submarine became beached on the southern coast.

Q: Were you having any problem dealing with communist influence and propaganda in your job?

YATES: No, the word wasn't even spoken. Communists couldn't operate. If anybody was even charged as a leftist, they would lose their career and family and be ostracized. The commotion over the real or imagined leanings of opposition leader and Honam native, Kim Dae Jung, was a good example of that.

Q: Were students coming from Seoul and spreading revolt?

YATES: After the spring semester was over, students would come down to Kwangju, where they sometimes would stir up trouble. We had demonstrations; we had threats. I was there during martial law. Park Chung Hee in 1971, I guess it was, declared martial law. I was in Chonju at a restaurant with several college professors, including several law professors, when somebody came in and said everybody had to go home quickly, because martial law had been declared. The shock of the Koreans I was with was immediate and deeply felt. *Q: What was the cause of the martial law?*

YATES: I don't recall the immediate cause. They felt things were getting out of control and decided to put a lid on and ban all assembly. If four or more people found themselves together on the same street corner, they could be arrested, even though they may not have had any sort of ulterior motives. In the American Center, we had a problem with our programs, since the authorities had insisted that we cease holding meetings. However, in consultation with the embassy in Seoul, we concluded that, as Americans, we had a legal and moral right to continue our calendar of programming. That unwanted decision was communicated to the local authorities, with the invitation to the officials that they were welcome to attend as well, if they wished.

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That caused great strain. Things got fairly tense. The Korean CIA had taken to posting their agents in the front of our American Center where their purpose was obviously to intimidate our library and program patrons. They would stand outside our door, taking names and attempting to stop people from coming in. Every day we had to clean up a circle of cigarette butts left in the spot where a sequence of chain-smoking goons had been posted. Yet our attendance did not fall off appreciably, for our clientele was a hardy lot of independent-minded natives of Honam. Nevertheless, I was greatly irritated by the official action of one of our close allies, and with Seoul's concurrence had to take one of my staff people, who was very reluctant to the point of outright fear, out to the Korean CIA headquarters in the western part of the city to tell them to back off.

We went to the Korean CIA headquarters in Kwangju, which was located in a secluded area. My staff said there was a snake pit in there where they threw people they didn't like, so they were most reluctant to go. I assembled my driver and Mr. Oh Hyung, my senior staff assistant, and said we were going to go along with our videotape recorder, so that we might show a sample of our programming and make the request for them to desist. I called the KCIA headquarters in advance with the request for a meeting, and they said all right. So I went out and saw the local KCIA chief.

We showed him the videotape and left some pamphlets and told him we would be happy to see him at our center any time for a discussion. Of course, we knew he never would come. After the simple demarche, his people still hung around, and the ring of cigarette butts continually marked where they had stood. Yet they did get off our backs, and USIS policy in Korea continued to be that we would not stop programming or change anything because of the dictates of martial law. It did not pertain to us. And people came. We had better attendance than we ever had. The lesson to the Korean government was clear. We could be as stubborn as they were and would not be pushed around. So on balance, the insistence to continue programming as usual was a good move.

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Q: Did you get involved in trying to explain the American protest movement?

YATES: It was red hot at that time in the U.S. but not in Korea. Koreans in general didn't understand the student movement in the US. They generally supported what we did in Vietnam, because we had done it in Korea and they had benefitted greatly by it. So there wasn't a great intellectual uncertainty about our actions. The Korean Government sent troops, and their people generally agreed with that. There was a lot of television coverage about their own troops in Vietnam. I don't believe that even today, they question our involvement in Vietnam.

Our programming on protest in America interpreted American society more in terms of how the American democracy works, and when there is protest in the US, what it really means. Is it like the Korean demonstration in the street or is it something else? One of the things that we did at the time was to try to interpret American mores and policies to those who were likely to become future leaders. I mentioned before the Kwangju 2nd Military Academy. There were about 2000 students there at the time. We made an arrangement wherein American Studies classes were held for the student body. I contracted with local professors from schools and colleges, who were competent in American studies in a variety of fields...literature, economics, history, etc. I went out to the Academy and offered to do a program for the cadets. I offered to pay the freight to bring in these professors to do a lecture program on American studies for the cadets. They were enthusiastic and agreed to make arrangements.

While I had expected small classes of a selection of cadets who had a special interest in American subjects, I was unprepared for the result. They put all two thousand cadets into the auditorium, all shaved head rows, not a hair in the place. You walked in and two thousand people stood up and saluted and shouted a military greeting. It was quite a sensation. You walked up and they had spot lights, recorders, new chalk, and erasers on the blackboard. They had cadre standing at the back with long bamboo poles. If a head

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went down, a bamboo pole would whack it. This was to make sure no one fell asleep. Certainly, one would not want to fall asleep at a Korean military academy.

I took a couple of professors with me for the opening session. I gave a short welcoming statement and then turned it over to them and left for the classes to be conducted entirely in Korean. The concept of the series worked out quite well. The professors I hired did not all have appropriate American Studies lectures in the courses they taught in their respective universities. Therefore, they had to do special work to prepare for the event. They would come to my library to do research, an important objective for our library in the first place. I paid them for the lectures, but they would have to do all the preparations. I selected the topic, and they would have to gather the materials and get up to speed for the lecture.

Thereby, I got double value for my dollar because, being good academics, they would naturally not want to spend all that effort for just one lecture. After delivering a lecture at the academy, they would use the same prepared notes in classes for their own students. I had about 15 people from different colleges and universities do these lectures.

I had one professor come to me at my office after he had delivered his lecture out at the Military Academy, and he was very pale. I asked him what was the matter. He said, "I have just come from the military academy." "How did it go?" He said, "I have taught for 20 years and have never, never taught two thousand people at one time. I am just blown away by that. My nerves are shot and my whole substance is all gone... two thousand people listening to me?" It was really quite an experience for them. It was a great program. We did two semesters out there.

We also did a lot of videotape programs. This was when videotape was new. We had 3/4 inch videotape. We were taping USIA produced material in Korean - our own motion picture unit did the conversion for us - and took them into Rotary clubs, schools, government offices, businesses, anywhere that we could gather together a few people

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who were prominent in the community. At the time, television was brand new in Korea. I had a heavy, but small 12" color TV set, a tape recorder, and a transformer. The transformer would enable us to boost or reduce the local current to the nominal 115-120 volts.

Our small team would go into an office or meeting room with all our gear, set it down, and while Mr. Oh Hyung and I had the usual polite cup of tea, my driver would plug everything together. The tape was, of course, cued and ready to go. For example, many times I would go into the Governor's office and set the TV down at the end of his coffee table and do the normal tea plus greeting chat while the equipment was quickly attached. In moments, I was all ready to go. Often, he would bring in most of his top staff, and they would all stand around while I played a videotape. They enjoyed it, because of the novelty and because it broke up their day of a constant stream of supplicants and complaints.

Any time I wanted to go and see the Governor or Mayor, I would just call and say we had a new tape on something I knew they would be interested in. I could take it in and get out in about 20 minutes. They loved it. I could get in to see governors, generals, etc. at the drop of a hat. It was really effective. I could take it to a Rotary club lunch and set it up on a high table in the corner and show a videotape, talk about it, and have a question period afterwards. It was really basic communications, but you had to have a gimmick. The gimmick was the TV set, which was only a 12 or 14 inch set and was great at the end of a coffee table. For the bigger shows, we had larger 18 or 20 inch sets. My driver and Mr. Oh were pretty good at this. We would do four or five showings in a day. I would go to Chonju and hit the university, the mayor's office, and business groups, one right after the other, showing the same tape. While we were saying goodbye, my driver would re-cue the tape and pack it up, and we would then drive off to the next stop. It was a real road show.

Q: Were you married while you were there, or did you come back?

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YATES: While I was in Kwangju, right at the end of my tour. We came back to Washington, mainly so my wife would have a chance to become acclimated to the American scene and complete her citizenship. I, of course, had to find something that would be of interest as a Foreign Service Officer in Washington. As it turned out, I had an unusual opportunity.

During my tenure as Center Director in Kwangju, we had a research study in country on the use of our libraries. The conclusions of that study were at variance with my experience and designs for our library, and I took the occasion to draft a lengthy memo to Seoul, detailing the specifics and reasoning behind my objections. I sent it to Seoul and forgot about it. When I came up for assignment, I got a call asking if I would be willing to come back to the Office of Research. My boss in Seoul, Mort Smith, had appended my protests to the Post response to the study, and the head of Research, Jim Mocerri, had evidently taken a shine to it. He evidently had some sympathy for what I had written. He wanted me to come back and show what I could do. So I got a year of university training for social science research in preparation for spending a tour in USIA's research division.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. We will pick it up next time in 1973. You took some time studying at the university and are going to be in USIA research division.

YATES: Okay.

Q: All right. You were doing research in the U.S. when to when?

YATES: I went back in 1972 and spent a year at the George Washington University where I studied mostly statistics and things that were related to doing statistical studies. This was in preparation for what was called the field injection program. It was run by the Office of Research in order to bring field experience back to Washington to fill what otherwise would be line jobs in research.

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Q: You came into the research division in 1973 and stayed how long?

YATES: Until 1975.

Q: Before you tell us what you were up to, could you explain where the research division fits in?

YATES: The Office of Research is the office within USIA which evaluates USIA products. Normally when we have a program or an event, you do an evaluation at the end, but that is by the people who are doing it. This was an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of USIA products. Did the products achieve the goals for which they were designed, have the intended effect abroad, and what possibilities would there be to improve on them? We looked at publications, film shows, cultural center operations, the Voice of America, and other USIA products. We also took social science or public opinion data from abroad and produced what would be political analysis of foreign audience feelings about the US, etc. That was the principal product which then got fed to the White House, and as far as I know still does. It gives us a "state of the world" in regard to impressions of the US.

Q: So in a way, there was a two fold mission. One, to see how well you were doing and whether you could do something, and the other, just to inform policy makers about how people looked at us.

YATES: That's right. And whether or not the programs we were doing had a bearing on those attitudes. So it was a measure also of effectiveness in a longer term. The problem is that many USIA programs are hard to measure. You send a person to the U.S. on a grant, and he may wander around the country for a month, meet a lot of people in his field of interest as well as people in government, do a little touring and stay with an American family, usually in the Middle West. He gets a concept of what the size of the country is and some of the ideas and policies behind it. How then does that person put into practice what he got on that kind of trip? This is particularly the case for programs like the International

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Visitor Program where you bring somebody here for about a month. Nonetheless, the theory is that these people are communicators of a sort, having positions in government, private business, etc. where they would then pass on some of their more knowledgeable ideas about what the U.S. is about. It is pretty hard to determine whether or not they do. That is what research is up to.

I joined the media side looking at products rather than generic opinion abroad. While I was in the Office of Research, I worked on several projects. One of the first things I worked on was a Brazil binational center study to see whether or not it was reaching the audience it should. The study had been going on for many years and was a dog of a study, since it was not very well defined. I didn't spend much time on it, because it wasn't worth much and to be honest didn't generate interest. Latin America was not a place where I had any experience. So I went on to other things.

First, I did a study of our Information Center operation in Lebanon. Information Center as opposed to Binational Center. The Information Center was run and staffed by us, a Binational Center was staffed by somebody else and usually headed by a Foreign Service Officer. They would collect money, teach English, and do things like that. Whereas an Information Center was chiefly a library, a point of contact for the local audience.

I made a trip to Beirut where we were doing the study. We had a Palestinian under subcontract, a very smart guy who predicted at the time (1974) that the Palestinians would not stop, the fighting would go on and get much worse, and it did. I remember being in that beautiful city with its great places to eat and nice people. Even then, however, after dinner at the home of the Public Affairs Officer, she told me to be careful on my way back to the hotel, because there was still some trouble on the streets. When I got out on the street, I could hear the machine guns not too far distant - but far enough so that I wasn't too worried - but it was a good reminder that things were not stable.

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While I was in Beirut, I took a weekend and went off to Baalbek, the old Roman ruins outside the city. Very shortly thereafter, it became inaccessible. The Bekaa Valley was the hot bed of Palestinian sentiment. On the way back from the trip, the bus was stuck in a traffic jam. The president of Lebanon was out there, and the local people were sacrificing a goat in the middle of the street, so I got to see a little Lebanese culture. To go to the National Museum where they keep the stone coffin which is the first direct evidence of a written language was an interesting and enlightening experience.

In the Center study, we were looking at the effectiveness of film shows, using panels, a technique of interviewing people in a group on impact, etc. We didn't get very firm results. First off, the troubles were starting to happen in Lebanon. I think the results of the study fell by the wayside later, because it no longer was important, given the general breakdown of the society.

The second study I did related to an analysis of a quarterly Agency publication, the controversial notebook compilation of technical articles on the American economy called Economic Portfolio. It was a quarterly publication done under contract with the University of Pittsburgh. The woman who ran it later became the president of the World Bank. She edited this version of American economic writings every quarter for USIA which then reproduced it and distributed it worldwide in a very limited way. Recipients had to be high level economists in order to understand the math and other contents of the technical volume.

It was an experience to target a very small group of people who were very important to us, the advisors to presidents, ministers of finance, and people who dealt with economics on a day-to-day basis. I had full control of the project, since the publication had been slated to be canceled as ineffective, but the deputy director of the Agency at the time, Gene Kopp, thought that we should at least have some empirical data on which to base the decision. I was selected as the researcher, since it was not a mainline project and others were simply

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not interested. That gave me full control. I designed the study, operated the mechanics of contact, and did the final analysis.

The study was a written one. I mailed out a questionnaire to all recipients of Economic Portfolio and to the Public Affairs Officers who supervised the programs in countries where there were recipients. Portfolio was going to be closed as being too specialized, and those who generally rated programs had very low regard for it, since they felt that it probably didn't have any effect on the intended audience. Their logic held that it was a waste of time, difficult to get together, and never on time anyway. The decision was based on almost unanimous Post sentiment to cut it in favor of other, more productive programs. I sent out questionnaires worldwide. It took some time for the responses to come in, but the surprising thing was that we began to get some very remarkable results. First off, many of the questionnaires were addressed to ministers or advisors and very senior people in these governments, and most of them answered personally, many in long hand. It turned out that the Economic Portfolio was very highly prized. For example, while I was on the study, I got an urgent call from the Greek Embassy in Washington. Evidently their minister was in the U.S. for an IMF (International Monetary Fund) meeting and recalled an article he had read in an issue of Economic Portfolio. He had not brought it with him and asked the embassy if it could locate a copy of that particular issue, so he could use it during the IMF meeting. That is what you call "direct evidence of effectiveness."

I got long personal letters from people like members of the Bundestag, and even the French ambassador to Japan, who had been receiving it before, wrote a letter asking if it would be possible for him still to get a copy, even though he was now in Japan. He prized the publication so much that he would appreciate it if we could arrange it. We got almost 100 percent response, unheard of in most surveys. Also, I got a letters from Guyana which was then communist-led. We had, I believe, six copies that went into Guyana, and all six recipients wrote back giving the publication the highest possible accolades. These were

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people who were advising a communist government and taking American economic theory straight off the top. An interesting situation.

Q: Were you able to turn things around?

YATES: Yes, the Agency switched its decision despite the contrary opinion of its senior program people. The parallel study, that assessing the related PAOs, came out 180 degrees different. Assuredly because they knew little of economics and could not understand the complex jargon it employed in its articles, they found it boring and irrelevant. The real situation, as revealed in the larger survey, was that the publication was having a direct impact on some of the world's most influential economic thinkers, irrespective of the kind of government they belonged to. That publication made a difference, but it was difficult to see that in the results that the Posts regularly reported in their assessments of their programs. It took some staff time to handle the bulky notebooks when they irregularly arrived, and the people to whom they were addressed were not a part of the traditional USIA country audience.

The final result was a happy one, as Economic Portfolio was resumed. We didn't miss a beat; every copy went out, because it had such a heavy impact on some very important people. The principle was one that was useful but not very well applied later. If you are careful at what you are designing and aim at the right audience, they listen. I used that advice later on in Japan when I had an assignment there for the same thing with some similar effect. But that was one of the principal efforts in research.

The third area where I had some impact in research was on the computer side. When I arrived, they were still doing things with pen and quill, so to speak. So I joined the fray to encourage the installation of computer facilities to process data in house. Eventually, the Office of Research adopted that advice. Also, I had a role in obtaining a statistical package called SPSS, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, which I had used in my courses at the George Washington University. I got USIA to buy a copy of that, so that

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the analysts could use it in their work. They have gone much beyond that now, but it was an important innovation at the time.

Q: Did you find a tendency that I have heard people talking about, particularly AID, where you send a tree expert out to some country and all of a sudden you have tree programs. If there is an anti-malaria person to Iceland, you end up with an anti-malaria program there. Did you find a similar thing happening in USIA where people would try to establish whatever their specialty was? Was this a problem?

YATES: I never saw it as a problem. That cuts both ways. If somebody has a specialty in anti-malarial program and ends up being sent to Iceland, that is not very practical. But usually the real situation was much different than that. For example, somebody who was a very good exhibits person would go to a country that hadn't used exhibits very well and would develop exhibits as a program. That would be natural and was good. It gave variety to the program. In USIA where you had people with different personal interests, it meant that they would talk to different people in that country, so that programs had a better spread within the society. If you only had political people coming through all the time, you would end up with a bunch of professors and political scientists who would be the only people that particular post would talk with. You need an artist once in a while. You need somebody with a background in economics or even computers. It spreads the impact of particular work.

In the business of communications and personal contact, you never know when things will appear from places that are most unexpected. In Kwangju, I had a close friend who was publisher of a local newspaper, the Kwangju Ilbo. Mr. Kim was an older man who spoke only Korean, no English. He was a little distant at first, but I got to know him and his son who was heir apparent to the newspaper. It was a very successful newspaper, and he decided to buy a radio station. He named the radio station VOC, the "Voice of Chonil."

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Subsequent to the purchase of the radio station, I was in his office and said, "I am curious. Why did you name this thing VOC?" He said, "There is a connection with America. When I was a young man, I wasn't a student, wasn't in school, and didn't have much book learning. In the late fifties after the war, I didn't have anything, I was broke. The only place I could go in Kwangju which would make me comfortable was the USIS library. I didn't speak any English, but I would go in and look at the pictures in the books and magazines. In the summer time, it was air conditioned, and in the winter time, it had heat." So for him, it was very nice. He said "Nobody there knew who I was. I walked in unannounced and wouldn't talk to anybody or ask any questions. I just came and left. But nobody ever threw me out. I wasn't the best dressed guy in town, but nobody ever asked why I was there or accused me of doing anything wrong or being out of place." He said he never forgot that. He said his VOC was in some way a remembrance of the experience he had in the USIS center and therefore a reflection of the name of the Voice of America.

This was an interesting lesson. He was one of those unknown people who would simply show up in our locations. Not invited, but not rejected and not judged. The activity was a passive one, in that we did not specifically target a particular sector of the society or, at least, did not exclude those who might not fit our preconceptions. Our libraries were exactly in keeping with the design of Ben Franklin who saw them as a resource for the entire community. We didn't keep their names and didn't know who they were, but they received an impression, received something from their visits that lasts their whole life. Mr. Kim Nam Joong, the owner of VOC, also later became the National Assemblyman from Kwangju, a major player in the government party. At the time, he owned the only big hotel in Kwangju and was rich and influential. But he owed us in a very Asian way, a semblance of a debt, and the way to repay it was naming his station VOC. The same kind of thing was true in other parts of the world.

Q: In USIA 1973-75, what was the spirit? This is both Nixon, Ford, and part of Watergate. What was your impression of the leadership?

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YATES: It was sort of irrelevant to what I was doing. As a Foreign Service Officer, you marched to the drummer of the moment. That didn't mean that we were politicized. Our programs were mainly talking about America, not the Republican or Democratic Party or the intricacies of the political world in Washington. This is not an inside-the-beltway operation except in Washington. Outside of Washington, you are no longer within the beltway, and larger things become more important. The Nixon experience had to be explained abroad as best we could. We had to explain Ford and what he did. This was all important to other countries' policy makers, but there are other channels for that. Embassy officers, themselves, talk with their political counterparts and foreign ministries, for example. So USIA itself was not always engaged in the depth of political intrigue in Washington. It wasn't always relevant.

Q: Sometimes you would get a leadership in USIA which had very strong ideological or tactical points of view. Did you feel that then or was this, as far as you were concerned, business as usual? Were you concerned about the leadership at all?

YATES: No, because the leadership in the agency over the years expressed those ideological points of view principally in the Washington environment. One strong example of that was when Frank Shakespeare was Director. Shakespeare had strong conservative feelings and pushed a special agenda which, for example, mandated that all career officers would have to spend at least one tour in a communist society so as to learn the nature of that system. In principle, there may have been some merit to knowing one's enemy, but in practice, it never had a chance, since there weren't enough spaces in the communist world to permit all officers to be circulated through. Moreover, not everyone was tuned to the Slavic languages or cultures. The Foreign Service was a service of specialists who, although generalists by design, were specialists at heart and would gravitate to those parts of the world where they felt special resonance.

Charlie Wick had very strong feelings about lots of things that were not always carefully thought through in a political sense, but he certainly had good connections in the White

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House. And I went through a whole lot of people who didn't have any real political image at all. The best of the group were those who had a strong image, and the reason was that they commanded attention. Charlie Wick, who created Worldnet, was an example of that. Some people thought he was crazy. He was famous for his office rages during which, it was said, special distinction was given to the individual who was on the receiving end of Wick's thrown glasses. His staff were reportedly always picking his glasses up off the floor. He would get mad and toss them at the offending individual and tell them that they were fired.

Of course, he couldn't fire anyone, because Foreign Service Officers and Civil Servants had tenure, but it made him feel better. That was the way he showed his displeasure. He didn't hold grudges. Some people whom I knew felt he was very human. Like Frank Shakespeare, Charlie Wick had the ear of the White House and was able to maintain a reasonably stable budget. He was able to articulate to friends or to people who agreed with him in Congress the importance of that budget and why it was essential to keep things going. So the Director and the political types inside the beltway kept the machine running, but the work of the agency was done abroad, with the exception of Voice of America, of course.

Q: Were there any other projects you were particularly concerned with during this time?

YATES: No, that is about it.

Q: Then, 1975 whither?

YATES: I was then given an assignment to Afghanistan.

Q: You were there from when to when?

YATES: I arrived there in 1976 and left in 1978. I had about three months of Dari while I was still finishing up research projects. By that time, I had Japanese, Korean, and

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now Dari. Dari is a variation of old Persian. To a Farsi speaker, which is the contemporary form of Persian, it has an odd accent which some see as crude; something like that heard from someone from Brooklyn if they should visit Boston.

Q: What job did you have there?

YATES: I was Information Officer.

Q: What was the political situation in Kabul in 1976-78?

YATES: Afghanistan was a monarchy, and the people had overthrown the king, who left the country. Their prime minister was a prince of the royal family, Mohammed Daud. The problem with Afghanistan was that it was never a unified country. The borders were created by the British. The British invaded Afghanistan three times and lost three times. They did foolish things. For example, they would build fortresses as they would do in Europe and put them on the highest hill to command the surrounding territory. This was great for artillery but lousy for water. The Afghans thought they were crazy and they were. Those fortresses the British built still stand unoccupied and pristine, since nobody could ever use them because of the lack of water. If the British built and occupied one of these hilltop fortresses, the Afghans would simply surround them and wait for them to die of thirst. The British tried and tried and tried. They saw Afghanistan as an important buffer between British India and the Russian empire.

However, the interior part of the country hasn't got much to pull it together. The center of the country is mountainous and occupied by the Hazara. In the north, you have all the Turkmen types. In the south, you have the Pashtuns. To the west, of course, you have the Persians. You have the Dravidian culture in the southern part of the Indian peninsula, the Turkish culture to the north and the Persian culture to the west. In the middle of all this are the leftovers from the time when Genghis Khan swept through, the Hazara. Alexander the

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Great went through Afghanistan and was finally defeated by disease after his marriage to an Afghan bride. Anybody who wanted to conquer anything sort of ended up there.

Q: All the fun guys.

YATES: All the fun guys did a lot of damage. Afghanistan is a beautiful land, and the traditional kings that lived there had a very different life style from many of their peers in other states. Kabul was the capital, but it got cold in the winter, so they went south to the Helmand valley, which is a beautiful valley that the U.S. had worked with the Afghan government to bring water in for irrigation. The old kings, who predated the Mogul period in India, built palaces - not fortresses - at Lashkar Gah, located where the Helmand and Arghandab rivers meet. They had running water and sewer systems but no defenses. They built a small citadel on a slight rise to which they retreated in case of conflict. But the palaces themselves were not very well protected. It is graphic testimony to the fact that the kings lived a rather pleasant, peaceful life among the people.

They each had a big palace with water fountains and all those things you see in Persian literature. In fact, the architects who came from Persia did all the architectural work which we now remember as part of Mogul India. These architects influenced buildings like the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, and many other places in and around Delhi. You found that the palaces that were in ruin in Lashkar Gah and the mosque, part of which was still standing when I visited, greatly resembled the things you see in India as examples of Mogul architecture. It was a fascinating place to have visited. I always loved to go down there, wander around the ruins of the palaces, and sit and look through those old windows over the river.

Q: What was our policy towards Afghanistan during this time?

YATES: We didn't have much of a policy, because we didn't have much interest in Afghanistan. At the time, the Soviets really had control of the country. They had everything but the flag. They were the advisors in the military and the teachers in most of the

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higher institutes of learning. They controlled the medical system, and there were strong communist supporters throughout the government. Essentially, they had a throttle-hold on the country at that point, so we didn't have any specific or direct influence. You may recall that back in the Eisenhower days, the king asked the U.S. to supply them with weapons, but we refused. He then went to the Russians, and the Russians came across with the weapons. That is essentially what brought the Russians in, our refusal to give them arms. Now, you can say this was a wise decision to stop the spread of armaments, and this was clearly the intent of the Eisenhower administration's policy. We have to draw the line somewhere, and this is as good a place as any. But the consequences of that decision later on meant that the Russians had full sway in Afghanistan.

When I got there in 1976, the Afghans were making progress. They had leather factories going and were making significant strides in women's rights, giving them education and bringing them into the workplace. Traditionally in Afghan society, women were not given an education. They were considered to be barefoot, in the kitchen, and pregnant. That is what their function was. Only males could receive education. When we gave aid under the USAID program, a stipulation was that whenever we built a school, it had to be coeducational or at least divided in the middle, so that all the boys were on one side and the girls on the other. I visited some of those schools and saw the education that the girls were receiving. Smart kids.

On the other side, we gave aid also for social welfare progress. We had gotten out of the capital intensive projects such as dams and roads. Previously, USAID programs had built all of the east-west roads; the Russians built all the north-south roads. The roadbeds were different, although all very good. Ours were built for internal communication, and the Russians were obviously built for external communication. The Russians were extracting stuff, copper, oranges, and natural gas. They were sucking the place dry. It was clear what they were up to. The Afghans were very unhappy, because the Russians were pumping natural gas out of Afghanistan, but the meter telling how much gas they were taking was on the Russian side of the border. The Russians would report to the Afghans how

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much they had taken. The Afghans were not sure the Russians were being honest in the amount.

Afghans were uncomfortable with the Russians and didn't trust them. The Russians were non-believers, atheists. They didn't have a book, the book being the Bible, or in this case the word of Mohammed. They were ambivalent about Christians; since they had a book, they must have a soul. The Russians had no book, and thus no soul. If you shot a Russian, it was of no consequence. You would be more distressed over shooting a dog, because, although the dog couldn't read, it had a function, to protect the family or caravan. A Russian had no soul and no function. There was nothing lost, in the Afghan way of thinking.

The Russians had a big embassy in Kabul, much bigger than ours. Their policy of assignment was that Russian Foreign Service Officers would be assigned there for life. Every six months, we had a Russian/American night as part of our detente activities, because the two Ambassadors had set the practice up as an expression of good will. Nobody ever wanted the responsibility of setting these up, and it was usually relatively junior members of the embassy who ended up doing it. I remember one afternoon, I went to the Russian Embassy in order to fulfill my responsibilities in organizing the next Russian/American night. The Russian Embassy was located in a rather unkempt building on the other side of town.

Q: You are talking about the Soviet Embassy at the time?

YATES: Yes, but to the Afghans they were Russians. Anyway, I went to the Soviet Embassy and was ushered into a very large empty room. In the middle of this ballroom was a settee, two arm chairs, and a coffee table, all nicely covered. I was met at the door by a younger staffer who took me into the room and sat me down and said, "Would you like tea?" I said, "Thank you, yes." He then left me all by myself in the middle of this big room. I looked up at the walls, and they had big portraits of Brezhnev, Stalin, and other

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Soviet leaders hanging there. But there were a couple of places on the wall where there was an outline of a former portrait which was gone. Obviously, there had been a change in the line up, and they hadn't bothered to replace the portrait that they took down.

Two or three minutes after my young man went off to the right, on the left hand side one of the little panels in the side of the wall slid open, and a lady comes through with a tea service and three cups, which told me I was obviously going to be joined by somebody. Sure enough, a couple of minutes later in comes another man. We conversed for a while, but there was still another cup, so I knew we had another to join. He said, "Well, maybe it would be a good idea if we had someone join us to plan this thing." I thought that probably was all right. About three seconds later, a door slides open and in comes a third person. The Soviets obviously had cameras and microphones trained on us, because somebody somewhere was communicating in and out of this room without my knowledge and without direct contact. It was kind of fun.

The KGB people, who were all over Kabul, were assigned to the embassy under cover, but you could always tell who they were, because they would come to these Russian/American nights dressed like Americans in sport coats and kind of flashy ties, something you would see in a movie. They spoke very good English and were very polished. They were very cynical about Afghanistan, obviously to try to drag you out and make you express yourself cynically about Afghanistan as well. One can only speculate on the reasons.

The local stratification within the embassy was very clear. Policy people spoke very good English, dressed well, and fraternized with Americans, but people who were not policy people did not speak to you. If you spoke to them, they would smile and run away. Most of them were women, probably spouses, or possibly house servants. The Russians, of course, did not hire Afghans to man positions in the embassy at any level. One of the basic differences among the foreign embassies was that the east bloc would only be staffed with nationals of the country of the embassy. Americans were always surrounded

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by Foreign Service Nationals from the host country. In many instances, they were more important to the conduct of bilateral relations than were a number of the Americans.

The Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) provided continuity - they often were career people who spent decades working for the embassy. Their eyes and ears provided insight into what was happening locally, apart from the public record in the newspapers, and their responsibilities often were fairly senior. While Americans set the policy and the direction of embassy programs, it was FSNs that offered local judgement, gave counsel on contacts, served as intermediaries with the leadership and other “movers and shakers” of the country, and assisted with translation duties. Naturally, direct hires from the community supplied drivers, cooks, cleaning staff, and other services that a complex embassy needed. They kept all of us in touch and eased the problems of living abroad. Embassies that did not utilize FSNs to the degree we did were seriously handicapped. In addition to all their work, they also became good friends and really committed to establishing and maintaining active bilateral relations. The Russians, however, had none of these benefits.

Q: Who was our ambassador when you were there?

YATES: Ted Eliot.

Q: How did he operate?

YATES: He was very relaxed. He had worked for USIA at one point in his career and had a lot of interest in what we did. Another reason was that in Afghanistan, there wasn't much other work to do. We didn't have much in the way of economic connections and no significant military programs to speak of. Politically, Afghanistan was an important buffer state between the Soviet Union and the subcontinent, but Americans had little connection there. Internally, there was the usual intrigue and infighting that provided the fodder for political reporting, but activities in that landlocked country did not figure large in American concerns.

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However, the USIA program was a very vigorous one. We had one USIA center in Kabul with a library and small auditorium, as well as a pretty good staff. We operated throughout the country with our programs and while travel was important, most of our contacts were in Kabul where all governmental activity was concentrated.

Q: I have always been surprised at meeting Afghans who, since the unpleasantness in 1979, seemed to have gravitated to working in libraries, at least in the Washington area. I have seen them in Georgetown and George Washington University libraries. Very pleasant and obviously well-educated people.

YATES: USAID operated a very big dam and irrigation project in the Helmand area during the late sixties, and as Information Officer, I came up with an idea for a film explaining the project to the Afghan public. I wrote the concept, did the research on location, took a film crew down to get some initial footage, wrote the script, arranged for the soundtrack music, and completed the storyboard for the film crew we used from Afghan Film. Because of the film, I made a number of trips to Lashkar Gah, Kandahar, and the Helmand region. It was an interesting story.

We were having troubles with Soviet pressure on the Afghan government to withdraw its support from the AID project in the Helmand valley. We had built a big dam at Kajaki with support by the Afghans. The Afghan government was putting money into this program in a matching arrangement with the original USAID grants. The problem with the program was that we had irrigated the land, but the Afghans had said they didn't want big drainage ditches. Their reasoning was that the ditches were useless and would just take water away, while they wanted to keep the incoming water in the area of the crops.

Of course, since the water did not have a means to run off, what remained evaporated, leaving behind a deposit of salts. Over time, the irrigated land became saline, and crop yields were diminishing. The Soviets wanted the Afghans to put the resources that they had into the Soviet-sponsored provinces. We had the Helmand-Arghandab River area and

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the Soviets had the orange growing area in the east and northeast part of the country. The Soviets wanted to see those resources diverted and we didn't. So what I came up with as Information Officer, was to do a film to explain the project and frankly deal with the desalinization problem and show what can be done when you do irrigate with drainage ditches.

Wisely, USIA in Washington hired an American Director out of a Boston documentary film company, Urban Image, to do the final work on the film. We produced a 15 minute documentary on the valley that I think was very effective. After the revolution in 1978 when the communists took over, we closed up the embassy and sent everybody home. I am told that the only thing that was running for any entertainment in Kabul at all was that film. They ran it continuously about eight or nine hours a day. They had full audiences all the time. There was nothing else to do in town.

There were even a lot of communists from the government who came over to watch the film, because there was nothing else to do. They enjoyed the music. The music that I picked was through a friend of mine named Madadi who worked at Radio Afghanistan, a music major who was trained in Germany. He was a collector of Afghan folk music, and would invite people from outside Kabul, sheep herders and others who would learn self-taught flute and traditional instruments, to come in to Radio Afghanistan studios at any time. He would record their music, and if he liked it, he would put them on the air. You would get some beautiful, haunting music, mostly based on local folk tunes and traditions. All of it was recorded and then archived at Radio Afghanistan. It was wonderful music - completely artless, pure music.

I asked him to come up with some suggestions as to what he thought would be suitable. He came up with a couple of tapes, and I went through them and picked out the pieces I thought sounded right for the kind of story board I had put together. I heard later there were some comments about where I got the music. It was one of the most satisfying projects I completed in my career and possibly had some sort of undetermined effect

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on the thinking of Afghans who watched it. When I returned to the U.S. some time later, a friend rescued a print from the archives that were slated for destruction, and I ran it through a "film chain" to make a videotape copy. I still have that copy and will reminisce by watching it now and then. It was a lot of fun to do.

Q: What was your impression of the political officers. Was it difficult for them to do anything?

YATES: There were some dangers there, because the society at the time was at least half communist and there were threats. The CIA station chief specifically was threatened with death. Toward the end, we all were threatened with being shot on the street if we were to come out. We got what was described as an "educated Afghan" letter dropped in our library, saying unless the U.S. government declared solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle with Israel, they would start shooting Americans on the street at random.

We had the usual security lectures. We were supposed to vary our route to and from the embassy or our USIS offices daily. That didn't work at all, because there were few roads and equally few options to use as variations. The threats were serious nonetheless, and we all had to take precautions. For example, the security officer brought a crew to the USIS compound to install solid metal doors which he planned to have propped open during normal times, but which might be dropped over the windows in an emergency. I protested strongly, since the solid metal doors probably would not provide much protection in any event and would serve principally to block the natural light from our offices and probably diminish the flow of fresh air in the dusty climate. One victim of the plan before the whole project was abandoned was a small tree outside of my window. I had cherished that tree, since there were few green things in the compound where we were located, and although it was not much more than a weed, it was a green weed that softened the stark atmosphere of the office. Security problems caught up with the embassy, however, and after Ambassador Eliot left, his replacement, Spike Dubs was captured and taken to the Kabul Hotel downtown where he was killed in a shoot-out between the rebels

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and the army. To my knowledge, no one ever determined who was responsible for the Ambassador's death.

Q: That was after you left?

YATES: Yes, shortly thereafter.

Q: Tell me about the 1978 revolt.

YATES: I had a bird's eye view of it. I was in the office on the Saturday morning in April, as usual to pick up the traffic and read and work on the wireless file. A few of our local employees were in the back, working on a project for our print shop. It was about 10:30 when I heard a commotion and a big explosion somewhere outside, not very far away. In no more than about 30 seconds after that, the telephone rang and the Marine guard at the embassy asked if I had heard anything funny? The embassy was about a mile, or a mile and a half, from the USIS offices. I said that I had. He thought I had better leave for home, because there was something serious going on.

The American Embassy where the Marine Guard stood watch was somewhat outside of town on the road to the airport. He said that they had seen a column of tanks heading into town a few minutes earlier. What had happened was, the tanks had proceeded down the airport road and had come to a stop in front of the Ministry of Interior, about a block and a half away from the USIS building. They had fired a round into the ministry and that was what I had heard.

I shooed everybody out, the local employees who were working in my graphics shop and those in the print shop, locked the place up, and went home. By the time I got home, things had started in earnest. I put the car in the garage and locked the gate. Fortunately Young Ne had earlier gone back to the U.S. for a break away from the boredom of the two-year tour. She was staying with my parents in Mystic, Connecticut, awaiting my return at the close of my tour in Kabul several months later.

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Inside the yard, our house man, Saqui, was mowing the lawn. We had an enormous lawn. The house had been owned by a German couple many years ago and then a mayor of Kabul or some other high ranking official had lived there. It was an enormous piece of property. We paid a pittance for it, because the embassy had leased it on a very long lease years before. Saqui was mowing the lawn, and I told him there was trouble and he should come into the house, which had very thick walls. Saqui said, "No, no, I am cutting the lawn, and I am almost done. Just another five minutes, no problem." He kept pushing the hand mower, and I repeated my insistence that he come into the house. Just as I finished the sentence, there was a "tut-tut-tut" through the trees above our heads and leaves began to flutter down around our ears from the shells going through the trees. Saqui then decided the idea was probably good and came into the house.

Afghans were fighting Afghans, so they were all using the same equipment and wearing the same uniforms. Our house covered the better part of a half a block, with the remaining part the block consisting of a Mercedes dealership and a small battery factory. At one point, an armored personnel carrier appeared on one side of the block. You could hear the grinding of the armored personnel carrier as it crept slowly along, obviously searching. It had a machine gun mounted on top.

On the other side of the block, the other side of the compound, was a tank. If you looked out the window, you could see the phosphorus streak of every third or fourth shell when the tank fired. They weren't firing at us in the house, but they certainly were close. This cat and mouse game went on for about an hour and then ceased, as they tired of the game and moved away. I never knew what finally happened. There also was a machine gun on the top of a police box which was about a block away to the southwest, and whichever factions controlled the police station kept firing over the yard beside the house. So there was a lot of stuff flying around.

I didn't feel directly threatened at that time, because the walls of the house were pretty thick and would have stopped any kind of ordinance from a smaller weapon. The danger

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was aircraft. In the early afternoon, they starting strafing the royal palace which was about two blocks away on the other side of a park in "Sharinow," the new city of Kabul, near the Blue Mosque. I was on the northwestern side of the palace. The jets were approaching from the south, strafing the palace and then lifting up. Just about where the house was, they would hit the afterburners to give enough boost to come around to make another run. There were one or several jets continuously at the game for at least an hour and a half.

The problem was stray shots that landed in places that were unintended. At one point early in the afternoon, I was in the kitchen. I had moved the refrigerator slightly away from the wall, since I thought that crouching behind it would increase my safety while in the kitchen which had thinner walls than the other parts of the house and therefore did not provide the same protection. I decided I would eat as solid a lunch as I could, before it got dark and we possibly lost power. Behind the refrigerator was an interior wall and then a small room about 6 feet wide, somewhat bigger than a closet, where we stored firewood. It also served as a pantry. On the other side of the external pantry wall was a battery shop where they repaired car batteries.

While crouching behind the refrigerator trying to wolf down a piece of steak I had managed to fry for lunch, even though everything had to be done reaching up from the crawling posture on the floor, there was a bang next door, a sort of thud and crash. I didn't pay much attention to it, with all the noise of the jets passing over. Not until later did I learn that a stray rocket that had been fired at the palace hit the shop, was a dud and didn't go off. Luck was with me that afternoon, since had the missile exploded, it would have blown me away or at least buried me in the rubble of the pantry and kitchen wall. I was thankful for the inefficiency of Russian arms. It was probably old ammunition. The Russians were famous for giving the Afghans old junk that the Soviet forces could not rely on any longer. At the time, I was thankful for that policy.

The strafing, noise, and vibration went on for about an hour and a half. Then about 3:00 in the afternoon, there was a sudden violent thunderstorm. That sort of event was most

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unusual in Kabul. Normally, a dust storm arrived around 3 to 4 in the afternoon. You could almost set your watch by it. On the days I was at home in the afternoon, we would race around, slamming all the windows shut just as the wind began to suddenly pick up and the rolling ball of dust would come from the east and blanket everything exposed with a thick coating.

On this day, however, all the military firing and explosions must have stirred up the atmosphere enough to disturb the usual patterns and prompt thunder heads. Whatever the cause, the heavy rain and gusting winds drove the jets away and ended the strafing. When the rain let up, the jets did not return to the strafing pattern over the royal palace, and the battle shifted more to the west. Light bombers could be seen coming from the north east, probably from the Bagram Air Base, on their way to the western part of town where the sound of explosions could be heard. They were bombing military positions west of the city. Thereafter, the bombing ceased in the vicinity of the Blue Mosque, although small arms firing continued. The fight went on for about a day and a half. I spent most of that time crawling around on the floor. I didn't dare go upstairs where stray rounds might pick off the curious head above the window sill.

Q: Was your family with you?

YATES: Luckily Young Ne had gone off to the U.S. to study English at a summer course at Georgetown. I was very thankful for that since it was a frightening experience. She, of course, had similar experiences during the Korean War, and the repetition of such events might have been unbearable for her. The worst part of the fight was the uncertainty of what was going on and the prospect of losing communication with others.

When the fighting started, the telephone system was, of course, the first thing to get damaged. I had one of those Motorola hand-held radios that the embassy had issued for just such emergencies. Before the experience of the revolution, those radios were a significant bother. They had to be left in a plugged-in charger so that they would have a full

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battery, but the Marines used the channels to run tests now and then, and the things could go off at all hours. Those of us who had not gone through a real emergency did not have enough experience to know how valuable they would become when things got hot.

People who didn't have them suffered. In the beginning, I was able to maintain contact with the embassy by telephone. When the telephone system started to go down, it turned out I could call the western part of Kabul, but the embassy could not. For some strange reason involving the exchange system, the embassy could still call me by phone. So the embassy was able to relay a message to me, and I could then call the AID people out in the western part of the city and pass the information along. Of course, they could pass information on the fighting in that area back to the embassy. If anything, their experiences were much more severe than mine.

I remember a call to one of the AID workers in the western part of Kabul. He said, "What do I do? What do I do? I have two bodies in my driveway." I told him not to touch them and stay with his family under the heaviest furniture. The greatest danger seemed to be curiosity, since the diplomatic community was not among the combatants and had not taken sides. But inadvertently being in the way was a real danger.

For example, we in Kabul had a visiting baseball team from the American school in Pakistan. Parents in Rawalpindi doubtless were worried about their children, and there was a great sense of urgency to get word back that everybody was accounted for and safe. We got most people accounted for. They were told to stay inside, keep their doors locked, and stay underneath tables or anything heavy. As it turned out, they did and no one was hurt.

While unscathed, there was some psychic damage. The wife of one of the political officers did not have a portable phone, and she could not understand anything that was going on. Her husband was caught in the embassy when the fighting started and could not return. Without his presence at home and lacking one of the usually bothersome radiophones,

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she became distraught with fear and worry and suffered enough psychologically to require medical attention, adding to the concern of the rest of the community. The noise of the jets and the firing and explosions just were too much.

The only foreigners who were hurt in the fighting, as far as I know, were one or two German embassy staffers who went outside and took pictures of the aircraft while they were bombing and got hit in the legs by shrapnel or stray rounds. Their wounds were only superficial, but later served as a warning to those who would scoff at the constant remonstrations of the security people.

The fighting gradually cooled over a day and a half. In the interim, I finally lost telephone communication with the embassy and could no longer provide news and information back and forth with the western part of the town and the USAID compound there. Remarkably, however, the power remained on, and my trusty radiophone kept me in touch. On the morning of the second day, I crawled upstairs to look out and make sure that the quiet was real and that there was nothing moving. I saw one taxi, as I peered over the second story window sill onto the street running across the front of the house.

Unbelievable as it was, a tennis racquet slung over his shoulder, a German man dressed in tennis whites pedaled into view on a bicycle, going to the German club which was about a block to the north. To insist on the usual set of tennis in the morning, in the face of the fighting and destruction of the previous hours, was amazing, a display of total disdain for an obvious situation, one that I had not seen before or since. He had to be either crazed by the fight, simply did not care, or had found refuge in the sanity of habit. Perhaps he reasoned it was not his fight, and no one would bother a diplomat on a simple errand of tennis. I have no idea if he was able to play his game, but the sight was remarkable, nonetheless.

I later learned that several Peace Corps volunteers almost got hit, about the same time as I was crouched behind the radiator. A live rocket that strayed from its intended path into

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the Royal Palace flew over the Blue Mosque and killed seven Afghans in an apartment immediately opposite the mosque. The apartment that received the deadly munition was next to the one where the Peace Corps volunteers were gathered. Fate was measured in fractions of degrees in altitude and direction of the errant missile. It was perhaps the closest call for any of the Americans resident in Kabul.

After the fight was over, Afghan military people - I don't know from which side - came around to ask if we had any damage and offered to fix whatever was necessary. They went overboard to make sure that the foreigners who were not combatants were not injured in any way. From all of the later reports, it was evident that the Afghans took great pains to check on all foreigners and to repair whatever damage their houses suffered from the fight. Some houses had multiple bullet holes and other related damage, but no one had been seriously hurt. Perhaps it was the traditional sense of Afghan hospitality in action. Under the time-worn code, no harm must come to a visitor in your home, even if he is your sworn enemy and has inflicted severe injury on you or your clan. As long as the guest stays at your home, you are obligated to ply him with the best food and hospitality. This is true, even though as soon as he leaves your portal, you may murder him in retribution. Cruel code, but deeply imbued in the Afghan psyche.

Q: What was the impression of who did what to whom?

YATES: The Afghan politics of the time were complicated. The previous king was living in Italy. A prince of the royal family, Mohammed Daud, was serving as President at the time of the coup and was summarily executed. There were a lot of people who were similarly killed at the time of the coup, including people I knew and had worked with. For example, Daud's son, who was a really quiet and shy man with a beautiful wife and two young children, was a television producer. I had worked with him on programming cultural events, such as "Clark Terry and His Jolly Giants," live on Afghan Television. As a producer, Daud's son had worked with us several times on cultural programs. These programs had even included a live performance of a U.S. Air Force band, the first such appearance of

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an American military band in Afghanistan. He had no interest in politics. If the subject of politics came up, he always politely and quietly demurred. His only concern was his work at Afghan TV and his family. Later, I heard that he was executed, along with his wife and two kids. They wiped out the family. The Foreign Minister under Daud, Waheed Abdullah, with whom I had many visits to bring in guests or reporters, was executed in his office. A lot of people whom I knew from my work were either killed or driven out during that time. Some went off into the hills and crossed over the border into Pakistan.

The source of the revolution was partly ideological but more factional than anything else. The Parchamists and Halquis were the two big major communist factions involved in fighting the government. They feared that the government was becoming more and more Westernized, and each had a particular vision of the fate of the country and, of course, of the leadership which was to assume control. The revolution was not founded on religious differences, even though the communists, for the most part, were atheist, and the Muslims were essentially on the previous government's side. For a long time, the communists had complained about the privileged elite and the clear influence the royal family still had in the affairs of state.

How much direct influence the Soviets had on the event of the revolution is not clear, although their agents thoroughly permeated every part of the military, academic, and administrative sectors of society. Afghanistan was among the poorest nations in the world, according to UN figures on per capita income, and strong willed members of the communists placed blame for continued poverty on those in charge.

Supposedly, the Parchamists had strong ties with Beijing. In fact, I don't think anyone ever proved conclusively that there was this kind of ideological tie. The Chinese were certainly more friendly with one faction than with the other. The Halquis, either by conviction or default, were considered more on the Soviet side. But it wasn't very clear, at least to me. To me, both sides were of the same coin.

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After the Saur Revolution, questions began to emerge about which faction would take control. An effort toward a coalition government faltered and then fell apart, as the several factions continued to squabble with each other. This constant internal strife continued on during the later Soviet invasion and is evident today, although with different players, even though the Mujahedeen ultimately defeated the militarily stronger Soviet forces. Today the Taliban are at odds with their former allies, as the unifying effect of a common front against the hated Soviets was lost with victory. Afghanistan has always been infected with factional fighting. The Afghans do things differently from other nation states. They use the Koran as basis for conducting and resolving their conflicts. That meant they had strict rules to their fighting.

There is a little town that you can visit as you pass through from Kabul to Peshawar in Pakistan. I drove back and forth to Peshawar several times through the Khyber Gorge, a spectacular natural wonder that is unparalleled for rough scenery. In contrast, the touted Khyber Pass is little more than a bunch of rolling hills that had the good fortune to become the outermost limit of the British empire and thereby was romanticized by generations of British writers. In three frustrating wars, the British tried to subdue the Afghans and thereby, prevent Russian influence on the subcontinent. Each time they were soundly defeated. That defeat was perhaps as much from the difficulty of the terrain as from the fighting effectiveness of the Afghans, but the result was the same, the humiliation of the British Army.

You have to go north through the Khyber Pass to reach the narrow roads and multiple switchbacks that add a touch of adventure to the spectacular views. It is as though one could drive up and down the mule trails in the Grand Canyon. Particularly in the early or late hours of daylight, the canyons and rills were particularly beautiful, even if the winding switchbacks were dangerous from erratic busses and overloaded trucks plying back and forth to the border and from falling rocks and an occasional herd of goats.

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A short distance outside of the Pakistani city of Peshawar to the south of the Khyber Pass, there was a gate which was closed at dusk. It was a gate with no fence flanking either side of it, and the road ran directly through the gate. The act of locking the gate at sunset was symbolic rather than practical, as the Pakistanis did not control the area next to the border, and it was a no-man's land after dark. A small village at its midpoint was a bandit village called Landi Kotl. It was said you could buy anything there that you wanted. You want a DC10 tire? Next Tuesday they would have it. You want the latest refrigerator? They would bring one in. Everything was smuggled.

Young Ne and I visited the town on one of our trips, escaping Kabul for the cultural change from southwestern Asia in Afghanistan to the subcontinental life of Pakistan. In Landi Kotl, people walked around the streets with bandoleers similar to those you can see in the old western movies. All they needed were sombreros, and they would fit right into the archetypal horse opera. They bristled with guns of all sizes and shapes. Rumor held that if you could find a picture of a gun in a magazine, a gunsmith in Peshawar could fashion a reasonable likeness that performed something like the original. It was quite a place. The Wild West in the middle of Asia.

Everybody was armed in Afghanistan, and when the different factions would do battle, they would always go to the mountains. It was against the rules of Afghan warfare to fight in the villages or involve women or the children or the elderly. The rules went so far as to stipulate that you never even involved cattle. You never killed somebody's cow. You never fought in a person's home. So if you were invited to an Afghan's home and he hated your guts because you had killed his brother, he would be a wonderful host. As soon as you left his gate, watch out, because he probably will put a knife between your ribs. But as long as you were in his home, you were a guest. They have very strict rules.

When the fight that swirled about the Saur Revolution spread outside the capital, there was an incident in a mosque in a village south of Kabul. In the aftermath of the struggle, into the village mosque strode a young, bright-eyed communist cadre who pronounced,

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"All you old men get out of the mosque. This is going to be a museum. We are doing away with religion." The old men attending the service got themselves up, grabbed him, cut his head off, and threw the body along with its severed head into the river. Those in the revolutionary command in Kabul evidently decided that they had to teach this village a lesson to intimidate others who might have entertained similar measures to inflict on the new leadership.

Although I never had the full story, the commonly accepted version that was passed from person to person was that the new revolutionary government in a fit of anger dispatched jets to strafe the village to teach them a proper lesson. Afghans at the time refused to believe that an Afghan pilot was at the controls and guessed that it probably was a Russian pilot, for only a kaffir (non-believer) could commit such a heinous act. Once the carnage became known, it was as if an electric shock passed through the country. The purposeful killing of villagers, women, children, elderly, and cattle was not done by even the fiercest Afghan warrior. It was completely outside the code. It was not Afghan. It matters little now just who sat at the controls of the offending warplane, for the die had been cast, and the course of the eventual fight against the new leadership and their atheistic supporters irrevocably determined.

I had a young man on the staff who we knew was a communist. He was a very talented graphic artist and a generally pleasant person who appeared to be eager to learn and produce quality work for us. On that basis, I hired him. I didn't care what his politics were as long as he produced the quality of graphics we wanted. He would go to his political meetings and probably reported what he saw and heard at work, but we didn't mind, since the messages we were sending were intended as much for his coterie as they were for those who generally sympathized with the West. On one of the mornings following the revolution, we had managed to get the office back to semblance of order and one of my staff came to me and reported that the young man was in one of the back rooms crying and feared to be close to violence. None of the Afghan staff could get him to quiet down.

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The reason was that, as a bright young college graduate and a nationalist to the extent that an Afghan can be a nationalist, he had taken pride in the communist revolution which he saw as taking back control of the country from the royalist elite. That morning, he had been coming to work when he saw on the street what he recognized as a Russian soldier in an Afghan army uniform. He became distraught with the realization that this was not what they had fought for. Their idealistic struggle had not been to turn it all over to the Russians. This was a revolution upside down. He and others in his group had put their lives on the line for those Russians! It destroyed the very fiber of his convictions and violated his sense of justice as an Afghan. Through his tears he wailed, "This is not what we fought the revolution for!"

Afterward in my office, I asked the Chief of my print shop what he thought was going to happen if the things the young graphic artist saw and the stories of the jet strafing a village turned out to be true. He wordlessly shrugged his shoulders and just stood there with his head cocked to one side, looking pained. I pressed, "What are you going to do if the Russians stay; how are you going to handle the Soviet pressure?" The Print Shop Chief who was also a head-man in a small village in the outskirts of Kabul looked up and quietly drew his finger across his throat in a silent threat to the Soviets who had violated his religion, his tradition, and his people. He turned, and without further explanation quietly left my office. For me, it was an encapsulated prediction of what would take years of fighting and bloodletting on both sides to accomplish. But that is essentially what happened.

The foreshadowing of the tragic Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the slow bleeding of the Soviet forces in an unwinnable war, and the ultimate cutting off of the head of the "Kaffir" Russian troops were summarized in the silently shrugged shoulders and the finger across the throat. To my Print Shop Chief, it was obvious. The Afghans have a creed: if you are wronged, you must redress the injury, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If you were wronged by any member of another family or clan, the wrong must be avenged by a member of the injured clan or family. The injury might be to someone you had never laid

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eyes on, a distant cousin, but someone of the same blood had a debt of honor to repay the wrong. When the Russians strafed that village, everybody who had relatives who were killed, maimed, or injured was committed, regardless of their politics, to redress the act. The effort to avenge the sin inflicted on Afghanistan had to continue as long as one Afghan had the breath to continue the fight, and fight they did to the everlasting regret of their Soviet tormentors.

Q: This was during the 1978 revolt?

YATES: Yes, 1978.

Q: Were the Russians involved?

YATES: While the incidents I recounted involving members of the Soviet military were beginning to occur, the Soviet role at the time was on the sidelines, supplying arms and giving moral support to their supporting faction. The Chinese were also in the role of supporting the revolution, but either distance from the action or a general wariness evidently kept them from a more direct role.

Q: You mentioned Prince Daud's son, his wife, and children were killed. What about the fact that they killed the wife and the children?

YATES: That's right. That act confirmed to true Muslims that these were unquestionably "Kaffir." Afghans believed that none of their kinsmen would do such things. It is a society of harsh rules and similarly harsh penalties when those rules are broken. Yet another example of this rigid code was played out at our own house. We had two brothers who worked for us, doing chores and serving as watchmen. The two were from the Panshir Valley, reputedly the toughest part of Afghanistan and the bane of the Russian presence when they later took over the country. Panshiris are born fighters and have a long history of real rough and tumble. The two brothers had asked to go home once in a while to visit with their families, so on alternating weekends one brother would go home, leaving Friday

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night and returning the next Monday morning. We had to keep somebody in the house all the time, because theft was a real problem, and a house untended was an easy mark. One weekend, the younger brother, Mahmut, went home but failed to return on the following Monday. Mir, the older brother, said that he did not know where his brother was but not to worry, he would certainly be back the following week. So we had one man left in the house that week, which meant he couldn't leave, because someone had to be in the house all the time. The second weekend came and went but still no Mahmut. I told Mir he should find out where his brother was, because help was needed to watch the house. He tried to get a telephone call through to the Panshir Valley, working at it all day. Finally, his call got through, and after much animated conversation, Mir turned to me and said he would have to go right then because his brother was in jail. I asked what happened, and he said he was not certain. He went off in great haste and much obvious worry.

He was gone for more than a week without a word, so we concluded that the brothers had to be replaced since we had an urgent need of help at the house. We did not hear from the Panshiri brothers for more than a month. Finally one day, the doorbell rang, and when the door was opened, there was the younger brother Mahmut standing there smiling and requesting his job back. I replied that he was gone for so long, how could he expect to get his job back. "Oh, yes, long story" he grinned sheepishly. "What happened?" I pressed.

As it turned out, he had gone back for the weekend, and during his stay, his wife got into a fight with a cousin's wife over a coin found on the floor. They started to shout and pull hair and ultimately drew the two husbands into the fray. At some point, a large machete-like knife of the sort Afghan raisin farmers use to cut grapes became a part of the fight. In the midst of the struggle over the knife, Mahmut caused the end of his cousin's nose to be sliced off. According to Afghan law, if you cause another to be maimed, it is an automatic five year jail sentence with no questions, no trial, no lawyers. Mir, the older brother, went back to find out what happened to Mahmut and to try to get him out of jail. After arriving home, Mir was jumped by the members of the maimed cousin's immediate family who proceeded to cut Mir's ear off. That act balanced the earlier injury, so Mahmut was then

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eligible for release from jail. Two wrongs might not make a right, but in Afghanistan, it can lead to a removal of penalties. Everything was now settled. Mahmut was out of jail and Mir was healing. Both of us felt sympathy for the plight of Mahmut and for the well-being of his older brother, but by that time we had employed a replacement and there was no job waiting. Mahmut understood but was very disappointed.

About three months later, Mir appeared at our doorstep with a dark knit hat similar to a ski cap pulled down one side lower than the other. Sure enough, he was missing an ear. That is the level of toughness in that country. For some reason, the Soviets either did not understand the code or choose to ignore it. They did so at their peril.

Q: Despite all this, the Russians kept their people at their embassy there forever.

YATES: Yes, that is right. That is the big mystery. Either their communication structure didn't work or they didn't want to believe. They had everything except the flag, but insisted on that too, which drove them into a Vietnam-like conflict. They were sucked into this thing and had no possibility of victory. They would send helicopters into the Hazarajat, the center of the country. The problem there is that the Hazarajat peaks are about 12,000 feet, and the Soviet helicopters did not have the capacity to maneuver well in the rarified atmosphere at that height. The problem was the Afghans with those old British Garand-style rifles, not much improved over a long barreled musket, who would sit on rocks on the tops of mountains, shooting down at Russian helicopters which unfortunately had armor plating only on the bottom, assuming that ground fire would be received only from beneath the flying aircraft. The Afghans with their antiquated firearms were taking them out like flies in the Hazarajat. There was another technique that proved remarkably successful for the Mujaheddin. The Soviets would send a column of tanks and armored personnel carriers up the mountain pass to bring unassailable force on the unruly villages. The Afghans, in this case the Hazara, would simply wait until they got into the interior a little bit and push rocks down on the pass behind them and in front of them, so they were bottled up. Then the intrepid Afghans would sit up on the rocks and wait. The sun would get higher and

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higher in the sky, and it got pretty warm in those armored vehicles. As soon as a head would pop up, they would shoot. So the forces in their otherwise impregnable vehicles died either of thirst and starvation or from being shot when they came out. The technique was a variation on the method used against the British with such effect in three previous wars. The Russians couldn't get columns up the pass. They never did get into the Hazarajat, and never obtained control over that part of the country.

It was an ugly war. A similar thing occurred in the vicinity of the Salang Pass, a series of tunnels through the mountains at about 12,000 feet, connecting Kabul and the southern part of Afghanistan with the northern part. The Afghans would wait until the Russians got halfway through the tunnel and cause a landslide at both ends. Accounts of these exploits were frequent in the western press, but the Russians had little choice but to move men and material over very few roads.

The whole Russian involvement in Afghanistan was difficult to understand. I remember sitting in a "Country Team" meeting chaired by Ambassador Eliot, debating whether the Russians would invade. I was on the side that argued under no circumstances would the Soviets directly enter the fray. They could not be that stupid. Others argued that the Soviet-built roads ran north-south, providing an easy invasion route, something the Soviets could not resist and possibly the principal reason for constructing the highways in the first place. Roads built with U.S. aid went east-west and completed the loop around the periphery of the country. In any event, the roads running north-south go to India and Pakistan, not to Afghanistan. I was convinced that the Russians would not invade. It was a point not worthy of debate. The British had found that out. I assumed that the Russians were sophisticated strategists, had long experience in Afghanistan, and undoubtedly knew Afghan history well. But inexplicably, they did enter. Perhaps the military command in the region took action on its own without considering modern intelligence, or they had better intelligence on the fractured alliances they held and decided to place a firm hand on the situation. Nobody has ever explained to my satisfaction the rationale that led to the Soviet

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foolishness. Maybe now that we have better relations, someone can dig into the pertinent archives and come up with an adequate explanation.

Q: One thing I heard was how you had the geriatric group of Brezhnev and his cohorts in charge and somebody got the bright idea of teaching the Afghans a lesson. Nobody could figure out why they came in, because it wasn't necessary at all. I think in 1979, there was another little change-over in government.

YATES: There were some things, though, that were going on in Afghanistan that I think the Soviets were unhappy with. For example, I mentioned before the IMET (International Military Education and Training) program that the embassy ran. The U.S. military attaches at the embassy were picking young colonels in the Afghan air force and sending them to a base in the U.S. for a few weeks of training. When they came back, they had remarkably different attitudes. These were the brightest part of the Afghan military. They had a taste of something entirely different from what they had known. Most had been Soviet-trained and Soviet-equipped. When they went to the US, say somewhere in Kansas, they would report to classes with American pilots. They would eat in mess halls with American GI's and would be invited to the homes of Americans on the weekends. They would celebrate holidays with others, go on picnics, hang out with their American classmates, and were clearly a part of the student body.

It wasn't that way in Russia. When the Russians trained the Afghans, they were kept in separate barracks and not allowed to fraternize. Even when they went to and from Moscow, which didn't happen very often during their training of one or more years, they were isolated. On such trips, they had to pass through either Tashkent or Mary, which necessitated an overnight stay. On arrival at the airport, they were put into buses with the shades rolled down, taken to the hotels, and locked in for the night. The next day, they were put back into the buses and taken to the airport where they would depart for Afghanistan. The Afghan ethnic groups extend across a wide region of the center of Asia and of course, knew that they had relatives in those Central Asian cities. They

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had a strong desire to meet their relatives but were not even allowed to see their city of transit, never mind the relatives. So what was happening was these young, smart, very carefully chosen Afghans, especially pilots from the Afghan Air Force, were becoming very Westernized. I think the Russians felt they were losing their grip on the best of the Afghan military. Although the IMET program for Afghanistan was small and low budget, it was having a significant impact.

IMET is the subject of a lot of controversy. For example, when the Timor massacre happened in Indonesia, Congress mandated that we kill all the programs that supported the Indonesian military. One of the casualties was IMET. The military fought very strongly to get that reversed. It argued that the people who went into East Timor to try to straighten out the problem were the very people they had trained in the IMET program. They were the good guys, the guys with the white hats. By killing the IMET program, we were cutting off our nose to spite our face. And that in fact is what we were doing. It was a reflex action, taken ill-advisedly, because we did not have the sense to carefully weigh the consequences of our actions at the time.

Q: When did you leave Afghanistan in 1978?

YATES: June, 1978.

Q: What did you feel whither Afghanistan as you left?

YATES: At that time, of course, the fighting was over. The revolution was over. The Russians had not yet come in. There was much arguing among the factions, but the ideologues clearly had taken over. The American Embassy had lost much of the earlier close contact we had with the government. However, to me the "revolution" appeared to be one of personal factions more than ideological communist revolt. I have served in Beijing just after Tiananmen, Afghanistan under communism, and visited the northern part of Korea after the death of Kim Il Sung, but every one of those societies, at least in my view, is based primarily on personal factions, not ideology. Ideology is the window dressing, the

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veneer. The underlying causes and motivating factors in the politics are not communist in the textbook definition. They are factional.

If these states are looked at in that light, then I think it is easier to understand why they do what they do. It is not very useful to run an analysis on the dialectic and draw conclusions from it. It doesn't work. But explanations do work if you consider factional dynamics, for these "communist" administrations most closely resemble feudal states in their attitudes and functions.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. In 1978 where did you go?

YATES: I went to Japan.

Q: And you were there until when?

YATES: Until 1982.

Q: Okay, we will cover that 1978-82 period next time.

YATES: Good.

Q: Today is April 3, 1997. Ken, you mentioned there were a couple of things in Afghanistan that we didn't cover and that we want to include.

YATES: I think it may be useful for your readers to hear something about the media that were in Afghanistan, particularly the foreign media that we were working with at the time. As I mentioned before, I was Information Officer in Kabul, and there were a couple of incidents that illustrate how the foreign media work in Afghanistan. There were no foreign media based full time in Afghanistan. Rather, a number of major American newspapers and news services had correspondents based in Delhi. Every time something happened in

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Kabul, they would come rushing in on the next flight. Some of them were very good; others were not so good.

I met Bill Borders of the New York Times in 1977. He was fairly new to the foreign service of the Times and was assigned to Delhi. He strongly distrusted government officials, particularly American officials. I recall when he came to my office for the first time, he was stiff and formal, and certainly very non-committal, as he stated he just wanted to let me know he was in town in case something happened to him but wanted no assistance even if it was offered in good faith. His attitude was one of suspicion and mistrust. I was a government official, and he was a member of the press who did not deal with U.S. government officials. Whether this was a product of a suspicion of all government officials or simply a high-minded journalist wary of being corrupted by a slant or special message, I never was certain.

Q: A brand new reporter out of the Vietnam generation more or less?

YATES: Yes. Bill was young at the time. He was a good correspondent, had a good reputation, and was bureau chief of the New York Times in Delhi. I felt sorry that he thought that somehow he would lose objectivity if he were to associate with U.S. officials. He left the office after giving notice that he was in town and proceeded into the wilds of Afghanistan on his own. At the time, such a presumptuous action was very chancy, because Afghans didn't trust foreigners in any case, that is unless you had something they wanted, and that situation did not arise very often.

I guess he went around banging on doors in Kabul, looking for contacts and the information that would give him the desired hook on which to base a story. He clearly did not get very far with that approach. Not long thereafter, he came back to my office, not quite with his tail between his legs, but almost. I had offered to help him if he needed any introductions, but at the earlier time, he was not interested. Yet he came to the realization that the natural suspicions of the Afghans were stronger than his resolve to remain

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unsullied by U.S. government officials, and he did come back. We were able to open some doors for him in the foreign ministry and get some real solid stuff.

A savvy reporter, he knew enough to realize that he needed basic information about Afghanistan and see that he would need someone the Afghans trusted to vouch for his own need for information. Of course, once he established himself as a reliable and careful reporter who was willing to listen and not abuse his sources, the Afghans accepted him directly, and he was able thereafter to move independently about the capital. Even though he achieved that degree of independence, he came to accept that the U.S. officials in Kabul had their uses. Every time he came to Kabul, the first stop he would make was to us to talk.

As his trust grew, he learned to rely on at least some of the information U.S. officials could provide as background for his visits in town. During some of the stressful times, he would come in and use our typewriter to draft his copy. Bill Borders was one of the best reporters to travel the Kabul beat during my time there. I would read his copy as it appeared in the Times, and his observations always rang true. Perhaps that consonance with what I knew to be true resulted in part from his consultations in the embassy that provided a foundation of his later work on the street.

Other reporters who, like Bill, were particularly tuned to events in Kabul and, therefore, were almost always accurate and perceptive in their copy included Sharon Rosenhouse of the L.A. Times, who also was based in Delhi at the time. She did not have the need for as much briefing as Bill Borders, since she had been in Delhi a longer time and knew more people in the Afghan capital. Most often, however, the American press was at a disadvantage there, because they didn't have very many contacts.

One of the stories that I remember well, illustrated the relative lack of expertise of the American press, bound together with a dangerous enthusiasm in the pursuit of a story; it involved Barry Schlacter of the Associated Press.

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Q: I have a feeling that American reporters operating out of Delhi were put there as a training assignment.

YATES: No, I do not believe so. Delhi was an important post. It was a major branch covering a large part of a very complicated part of the world. Delhi was a serious assignment that usually included the whole subcontinent and contiguous areas. All together, it constituted a very large area and some of the most heavily populated parts of the world. This broad area and convoluted problems placed a degree of stress on those assigned there and some complained of the constant travel and lack of hard information.

I recall one telling me he hated the work. I asked him why, and he said every time he plans something with his family, he gets a call and he has to be gone in ten minutes. He always kept a bag packed, was rarely home, and felt that his wife considered him out of his mind. One occasion he related was especially bitter. He and his family had planned a barbecue in Delhi for many friends, and just as things were getting under way, he was called away to chase another story. He left his wife behind to cover with his friends and very disappointed children. Such occasions made him yearn for a return to the U.S. and a more steady lifestyle. The life of a foreign correspondent was especially rough. Perhaps domestic reporters encounter something of the same problem, but not as large. Languages were not a part of most foreign correspondent's training or background, and they flew blind most of the time. Every time there is a fire storm someplace, the foreign correspondent has to scramble for the next airplane without knowing what conditions will be on arrival or when a return home will be possible. It is a tough job for them. Some did it well and some not so well. It is testimony to their skill and perceptive abilities of the best that anything remotely resembling an accurate interpretation of the news ever sees light of day. Of course, not all correspondents were as successful as Borders and Rosenhouse in taking the time to carefully puzzle out the real story.

Sharon Rosenhouse was a very fine correspondent who had a special advantage. Her copy was wonderful, but others wrote well also. The fundamental difference was that

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she had a very large news hole in the L.A. Times. To enable the paper to separate the incredible number of ads in each edition, the editors needed as much good copy as they could get. She was able to take the space to expand on a subject enough so that the reader had a chance to come to a better understanding of the complicated political and economic situations that confronted governments in the area. Borders, and others like him working on papers such as the New York Times, were forced to submit very concise articles to fit very limited space for international news, and there were some who always complained about their editors taking articles and slicing them to bits.

While I have no real proof, I harbor a strong suspicion that much of the misinformation that is foisted on the American public is the result of heavy handed editors who consider the politics of the story more than the truth of the interpretation. That may be a bit harsh, but most of the time I found foreign correspondents had a healthy curiosity, and a special talent for writing fast but reasonably accurate copy. It was the editors who twisted the analysis to fit the available space or dropped on headlines that were not supported by the information in the story, at least as it was originally filed. Again, this may be unfairly critical of editors of foreign news who are expected to be expert on almost every corner of the world and make considered final decisions on what the American public eventually reads as accurate information about foreign issues. Such a Herculean task possibly can never be met with total success, but I would be reassuring if editors of foreign news exhibited a bit more humility about their essential tasks.

Q: I interrupted you when you were about to tell a story about another reporter.

YATES: Barry Schlacter was a young, backpacking sort of reporter. He would come into Kabul and stay at those 50-cent-a-night flop houses where a lot of Australian backpackers stayed when hitchhiking from Australia to Europe to see part of the world and get a cheap ride to jobs and freelance. These news hounds cluster together in the cheap hotels and will chase almost any lead to carve out an exclusive for themselves

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Q: They do this. This is their once-in-a-life-time adventure. They go away for a year.

YATES: They were all over the place. They would stay in these flop houses. Drugs were easily available at very low prices, so if you enjoyed that culture, you were in great shape in Kabul. I cannot say whether these people were in the business for the adventure of far away places, the easy drugs, or the feeling that they were "one of the people". Maybe they were finding a better view of the local society by staying with others who were foreigners and generally out-of-the-main-stream individuals, lost in the movement between continents and stability. Perhaps we will never know.

Anyway, Barry would arrive in Kabul and leave sometimes without any notice or seeming schedule. He showed up just after the Saur Revolution which we talked about last session. Right after the heavy fighting stopped and the dust had settled a bit, he moved out to find the pulse of the new political arrangements. He was very aggressive in his objectives and worked his way into interviews in the mosques. Of course, religion in Afghanistan was a very touchy thing. The new government was avowedly atheistic and had decided that mosques had to be shut down, because they were disruptive to the ideas of the people. Schlacter ended up in Jalalabad, a border city to the south of Kabul near the Khyber Pass. There he went into a mosque and was talking to some of the mullahs about their thoughts on the revolution when the government picked him up. Some of the army troops in the area heard about it and arrested him. They brought him back to Kabul and after some "hot-potato" handling, he was deposited at the Ministry of Defense.

This immediately became a problem for the Afghan government, because by international convention, they had to notify the American Embassy of the fact that they were holding an American on some sort of charges. As Information Officer who had charge of the press, I was called upon by the embassy to search out the errant reporter, see him, and attempt to get him released. The revolutionary government was uncomfortable working with the American government or perhaps any other foreign government, because they were brand new. They didn't know what to do with this reporter whom the Army had perhaps too

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quickly arrested and brought back to Kabul. While they dithered about who was going to handle the problem, they passed him from one ministry to another in a game of musical chairs. When one phone call seemed to indicate that he was at the Ministry of Defense, that would be denied by claiming that he was at the Foreign Ministry. In turn, the Foreign Ministry would say that no, he was not there, “maybe at the Ministry of Interior?” Repeated phone calls were made and some visits, but I could not find the elusive reporter. This charade dragged on for a couple of days with nothing to show for the effort.

Finally, I got one of the translators from the embassy and said, “Look, we have to put a halt to this. The only way we are going to do this is to do essentially a physical demarche.” We got into a car and drove over to the Ministry of the Interior, which was Schlacter’s most recent stop and where, we had reports, he had been seen. I walked into the ministry and was ushered into an office where there was a very nervous officer behind a desk. He said, “Well, maybe we have him.” So, I sat down and said to him, “Well, find him and get him here, because I am not leaving until he is brought here and we have a chance to talk.” So there my interpreter and I sat. We faced the deeply discomforted officer from the sofa across from his desk. The poor man was in a prickly situation and was at a loss as to what to do.

Here he had an official of the U.S. government, together with a translator sitting in his office, both refusing to move. He couldn’t arrest me, as the new government obviously had to keep relations with the U.S. straight, even though the U.S. did not have strong relations with either the new, revolutionary government or the parties that participated in the overthrow of the old. Either his instructions were incomplete, or he was out of the loop, for the officer on the spot did not admit that his ministry had Schlacter. He was in a very sticky place. He talked incessantly on the phone, but mostly in a whisper or facing away from his two antagonists. He began to sweat profusely. This stalemate persisted for about three hours. Reports were always that they would work it out and get back to us

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right away, if we would be patient and leave. I responded they had been doing this for two days, and I wasn't going to move. We had to resolve the situation before we would move.

After about three and a half hours, a beaming Barry Schlacter was dragged into the office and they said, "Here, take him." Schlacter was amused and evidently pleased that he had real first-person copy of an incarceration and release of an American reporter. For him, it was a wonderful story, and he was happy to get his own exclusive. As in other times, the reporter became his own story. But those of us at the embassy had worked about three days on this missing citizen and were decidedly less pleased with the process. However, American reporters abroad must be considered first as American citizens and should receive as much of the protection as anyone else.

Q: Oh, absolutely. Did you have any impression of the coverage and how reporters from other countries operated, like Japan for instance?

YATES: They would operate out of their embassies essentially. It was the only point of contact they had in town. Afghanistan had not been a hot bed of interest until the revolution, and then everything broke open, but most reporters could not get in. They were constrained by the flight schedules of Afghan Air and other airlines serving Kabul. After the revolution, transportation became erratic, so it was very difficult for them to move around. It was possible to get across the border near Peshawar, but that meant you had to have ground transportation or a big pocket full of money, so you could bribe yourself across the border. The officials were notorious for giving hard times to those who were looking for an exception or something to happen quickly. After the revolution, crossing the border became suddenly much more difficult, especially for reporters.

I don't know what the Japanese press was saying, but the American press was uneven. Some people were very good, very insightful, like Bill Borders who worked very hard on his copy and Sharon Rosenhouse. They were the best. Others were less so; on a sliding scale that went way down to writing not very much but the anecdotal and were of rather limited

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use. The American public is not very well served by its press, unless their people abroad have experience in the history and culture of the society being examined. They tend to follow whatever rumors there are. The most famous rumor that surfaced during my tour in Afghanistan was the death of the Shah of Iran. That was during the period in Iran when the Shah was in power. BBC, AFP, and a host of other primary European organizations would regularly broadcast the death of the Shah. At that time, of course, the Shah was very much alive and still involved in the political life of Iran. There were rumors about cancer, and they eventually proved correct. Yet the press did not do a very good job, since the rumors that were broadcast were put out, evidently under pressure to be first out of the blocks on the story, and it was the public that usually ended up confused.

As with the vitality of the Shah, Afghanistan was not very well understood. There was a language barrier that could not easily be overcome. Additionally, there is a significant cultural barrier in the sense of antagonism on the part of the Afghans wanting to be left alone and not interested in seeing their story told to the world. They rejected what they perceived as interference from the outside.

The media were always a problem. I can recall earlier when I had been in Teheran for a study of the American Center there. I remember having a conversation with Gordon Winkler, who was the PAO then. We were discussing how difficult it was to talk to Iranians. One of the principal worries of the U.S. Embassy, at that time, was the attitudes of the mullah and the rest of the religious community. The embassy felt that they were almost completely out of touch with members of the religious sects, and they were an important political force in the society. We really had no means to get to them. We knew there was a problem. We simply couldn't get through. They were not listening; they tuned us out.

It was ironic, of course, that the mullah were the ones who came to power shortly thereafter. There was much beating about the ears of the U.S. government for not understanding and knowing of this; actually the government had a pretty good understanding of the problem, but lacked a means by which it could address this special

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difficulty. So one of the things I tried to do in Afghanistan was to get to know people in the Ministry of Information. The Ministry of Information, at that time, had control of mosques and religious propaganda.

Q: You were saying the mullah were a problem.

YATES: I remember sitting in the director's office of the Ministry of Information. He was a known communist but beleaguered, because the mullahs would have nothing to do with him. He controlled their newsletters and their nominal means of communication, yet could do little to bring them under his control. He frankly admitted that it was almost an impossible task. His observation was that many of the mullahs were not intelligent, and those with intelligence most often had little formal education. To be a mullah does not mean you have to go to school. You simply show up at the mosque and pray a lot and after a while you are recognized as somebody and are declared a mullah.

Anyone can declare himself a mullah who wishes to become a member of the faith. That means they can preach at will, and they do. Their preaching was not always scientific in his eyes, nor was it enlightened. They purposefully paid no attention to the director at all. So it wasn't just the U.S. government that had a problem with the mullah and the religious community; their own government had serious difficulties. He would sit and sort of cry on my shoulder about how difficult it was. It was an interesting sidelight of how other governments don't always work as efficiently as we give them credit for.

Q: Shall we move to Japan now?

YATES: There is one other aspect of my time in Afghanistan that might be of interest. Part of the job of the Information Officer was to handle, not only American press reporting on the country, but also other members of the American media community who would show up in Kabul. The most notable one of those was Otis Chandler who at the time was chairman of the board of the Times Mirror Corporation of Los Angeles - Sharon Rosenhouse's boss, I guess. He came to Afghanistan to do big game hunting. The

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mountain sheep that were in the hills are a rare animal, one of a number of endangered species, and they only live from about 12,000 ft up. You had to get up at least that high to find them. These are the sheep with the big, curling horns. There are very few left in the world, so the Aghan government at the time had a program of allowing big game hunters who paid about \$10,000 apiece to come and hunt them. Only several licenses were granted each year, and Otis Chandler had one of them.

He showed up in Kabul with an Alaskan dentist and one other person. They were a three-man party. It was a very elaborate scenario. He first came to Kabul and stayed for about a week and a half before moving with the party up to the mountains to get acclimated. Kabul is about 5,000 ft, so he was staging himself on the way up. He had been preparing for this hunt for a long time. The team had all bought specially crafted rifles with special materials which would not be affected by the extremes of temperatures or altitudes where they were going to do the hunting. They were beautiful, dark, long, big rifles. The team had to go up with a doctor, oxygen, and supply train, all of which was supplied by the Afghan government within the \$10,000 fee. The government guaranteed nothing. They were allowed one sheep apiece if the hunters were able to find the sheep and get them in their sights. That was their limit. It was entirely possible that they would go home empty handed.

While Otis Chandler was in town, I thought it would be a good opportunity for him to meet some of the Afghan media. After all, here was the chairman of the board of one of the world's largest media corporations visiting Kabul. I took him around to meet the different notables in my contact group among the Afghan press. The Afghan press isn't very big and the smallest paper at that time was Hewad, essentially the communist mouth piece in Kabul. Despite its eventual strength in Afghanistan, communism, at least nominally, didn't elicit very much interest among the people. Hewad was the government newspaper and was distributed by the government. Few ever read it. The man who was the editor-in-chief of Hewad was a poet.

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I was taking Otis Chandler around to meet all these people, and he was very patient with everybody, speaking to them with a disarming editor-in-chief to fellow editor-in-chief manner. I brought Chandler into the office of the editor of Hewad. The editor was not a stupid man; he knew who Otis Chandler was. He was floored. He could hardly speak, stuttered and was embarrassed. You could see this man who was in his office, about ten by fifteen, with kind of rickety chairs and not much of a newspaper. And here was Chandler talking to him well, you are editor-in-chief, what is your circulation, talking about technical things, how large a staff do you have, etc. We only spent about half an hour there, but the effect of that visit on that man was just profound, beyond my wildest imagining. He had always kept contact with me, even though he didn't have much of a circulation or influence, but after that, he was very, very friendly to those of us from the media on the U.S. side, even though he was ideologically opposed to us personally, because we had done something like that and treated him as one of the select few in Kabul. I think he appreciated that more than anything else we could have done. I don't know whatever happened to him. He was not young at the time. This was before the revolution. I suppose he survived because he was a communist.

The root of the story is that Chandler could have been very arrogant but wasn't. He played it straight on a person-to-person basis. Those kinds of contacts that USIA has been able to put together all over the world had an incredible impact over the years. Sometimes you set these things up, and you don't know what is going to happen. You don't have a plan for this; it is simply another check of the editors-in-chief in town. The result was just an incredible impact on this man's outlook towards us as a people and the American press in general.

Q: Let's move to Japan where you were from 1978-82. What was your job there?

YATES: In Japan I was Policy Officer.

Q: What does that mean?

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YATES: I was charged with overseeing the theory and operation of the Japan program. At the time, Japan had five branches Sapporo, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka and Tokyo. My job was the Country Plan; I made the initial draft of it each year. I handled all the public opinion and other research done by the post and also handled the growing use of computers. In Japan at the time, we were just getting into the computer age. While I was there, I installed a WANG VS-100 computer; it was state-of-the-art at that time. Because space in the Tokyo embassy was at a high premium, we had to locate the major works of the computer, the central processor and the large disk drives, in a converted closet along one hallway. At the time, the hard disks each occupied a device of its own and had interchangeable disk packs with a stack of "platters," each about a foot and a half in diameter and stacked about eight high like pancakes. It was not as powerful as a main frame of the time, but it was not too much different. It was a serious computer and permitted a large number of terminals.

In Tokyo, USIA was going to be the "lead agency," as it was termed, for all computers for the different sections in the embassy. The chief reason for that arrangement was that USIS had the initial interest and me, who had some experience in computers. So we got the original assignment to provide services for all. The Wang VS-100 we installed was to provide such service for the entire mission. The embassy was a ten story building in downtown Tokyo with about 20 different U.S. government agencies, such as the FBI, IRS, State, Defense, USIA, etc. All of us were going to work on the same computer. That was at least the theory in the beginning. So I wired the whole building, including communications.

After we got this thing running, I thought it would be a good idea if we could hook up with communications directly and thus be able to send cables from my desk as it were. I was told that could not be done. "Why?" was my question. "Because we have a classified system." The classified system was housed on the top floor of the embassy and was inside a vault like installation to provide maximum security. All that was needed was to connect my VS-100 through the wall of the vault and I could then fully wire communications for the

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embassy. Such an arrangement ran into difficulty, however, for I was told, “no, you can't connect a black line to a red box.” The red box is classified and the black line, unclassified. I argued that it should work fine and that, technically, there was no problem at all. We would only use an unclassified circuit, we would have unclassified control, and there shouldn't be any problem. “No, it is technically not possible,” came the response. I thought that was funny, because we used to have a thing called USINFO, an unclassified channel that used old teletype equipment in USIA. That system was stand-alone, but we were able to receive messages in the normal telegraphic traffic. It was mixed in with all the classified traffic.

USINFO was the original USIA network which was devoted to press materials, post advisories, and other unclassified items. It was slow but serviceable, a sort of bridge between the real “wireless” file that used to be broadcast from VOA relay stations around the world and the later computer-to-computer transmission that is now used. USIA posts around the world still used USINFO to receive longer messages such as press stories, long articles for placement or translation, and the usual internal messages such as transfers, admin messages, and the like. USINFO was handy to keep bulkier traffic away from the usual telegraphic channels.

We used to get USINFO messages regularly, and a dependable flow was important. Many posts without alternate technical means would receive USINFO traffic via the usual telegraphic channel. Knowing that was possible, I stood my ground and maintained that the “red” and “black” channels could coexist. I said, “You CAN connect a classified network with an unclassified one, and I can demonstrate that to you.” The communications technicians were adamant, “No, you can't. That is completely out of the question.” Asking them to just wait a bit, I said I would send a message to myself now and come back to the 10th floor to pick it up. They thought I was crazy.

I then went downstairs to the basement where we had a USINFO terminal and punched in a message to myself. Since our traffic contained a large number of USINFO messages

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in the telegraphic flow, it was easy to pick up an example with the appropriate addresses. After I had completed my keyboard work at the aging terminal, I returned to the 10th floor and asked for my message. Humoring me, they checked the received traffic, and sure enough, there was an unclassified message amid the classified incoming. I now had demonstrated proof of the mixing of the “red” and the “black.” Once more, I asked that the connection between my computer and the communications panel be made, so that I might enable telegraphic transmission and receipt directly from each desk.

While surprised, the communications people refused to budge but were curious about how such an unbelievable mixing was possible. The story was a bit convoluted but simple. The USINFO terminal is in the basement of the embassy. The connecting line was an old U.S. Army 75 baud circuit which ran to the old Sanno Hotel down the street. The Sanno Hotel was a U.S. military R&R facility and it, in turn, was connected to Camp Zama. Of course, from Camp Zama via Hawaii, communications were connected to the Pentagon which maintained a bridge to the State Department's communication system, and - voila - all the U.S. embassies around the world including Tokyo. That is how the simple typed message I sent from the basement arrived instantly on the 10th floor.

Q: Camp Zama was the American army headquarters in Japan.

YATES: Right. We later found that if we could get an address in the large worldwide cable system, we would be able to use that simple USINFO terminal as the basis for connections world-wide. That would permit me to connect my computer on the second floor of the embassy with the worldwide cable system. I discovered that the Department of Agriculture had an extra address it was not using and I could get it. Yet I ran afoul of a technicality, because the speed of the USINFO line was too slow at 75 baud to be able to match up with the rest of the network. The minimum speed to be acceptable on the network was 300 baud, and the U.S. Army would have to upgrade its circuit to the embassy from 75 baud to 300 baud. This involved the purchase of a \$200 modem. They were not willing to do

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this for our benefit since such older lines were being phased out wherever possible. I was never able to get the connection.

In reality, the Department of State really did not want to see such direct communication enabled, because someone would be able to sit at his desk and send messages directly by computer, transmitting them to any embassy in the world over the State Department network. While the whole e-mail system was technically feasible at that time, the problem was internal controls. Who would see what I said? Who would clear what I had to say? This promising project floundered. The technical people rejected it in the beginning, saying it wasn't possible. When I showed them that it could be done, they got very bureaucratic about it, and the promise of convenient and instantaneous communications, the stuff of e-mail today, never had a chance. I thought this was too bad, because I thought at that time we could really do something interesting in an unclassified environment which would allow us communication with our other posts all around the world. This was in 1978.

Q: I was just across the pond in Korea about this time, and we were just experimenting with a WANG computer there. It was pretty primitive.

YATES: That time was very interesting. One of the other things I had to do, because of my computer connection, was oversight responsibility for our mail system, addressing, which in USIA is called "DRS," the Distribution Record System. I had control of that in Tokyo. One of the problems with our DRS was addressing. In Tokyo, we had to use Chinese characters (Kanji) that are commonly used in Japanese addresses, particularly for names. People would use the phonetic syllabary, "kana" in combination with Kanji for everyday Japanese text, but because of the large number of homonyms in the Japanese language, the kana system is used primarily for inflections on verbs and simple connectives. For such things as names and addresses, you need Kanji, which are based on ideograms, and therefore carries a much more complex meaning than the kana. At that time, Kanji-based language was beyond the relatively simple machinery of the Wang VS-100, at least in addressing programs, and therefore made it necessary to contract our address system

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out. We had no Kanji printing capability in the embassy itself. I discovered, though, that computers were starting to come into their own, and there were some programs available back in the U.S. that might be able to handle our printing needs from there.

In particular, I found a connection to a GE node in Beltsville, Maryland that was being operated by the Japanese advertising firm, Dentsu, and they had a multiplexed connection to Tokyo working 24 hours a day. What we would have been able to do was to dial up a local number in Tokyo and get access to the GE computer in Maryland. This would have been much like the Internet operates today. In turn, they would connect us with our USIA headquarters here in Washington, and we would be able to exchange data plus use the large variety of programs that were online in Beltsville. They had a Kanji printing program that Dentsu was already using.

The basis of my concept was to do the processing in Beltsville and then, download a print file to us in Tokyo where our address labels would be produced. The advantage of this was economic, since the Japanese contractor was rather expensive and through this process we would have full control in the embassy in Tokyo. International computer connections were a relatively new phenomena, and the Dentsu network was not being used that much. The whole process promised to be a lot cheaper than the contracted services then in use, and we would have the added benefit of all of the software that was otherwise not available to us in Tokyo. As it turned out, we ran into all kinds of problems.

This seems silly now, in light of the vast amount of personal data that is available on the Internet, but at the time, we were worried about transborder flow of information on individuals. We had a name list that, at the time, included what we were sending them, when those materials were sent, plus a record of when a given person attended a program with us. This enabled us to maintain contact with our audience and have a better grasp about our effectiveness. The target audience in Japan, at the time, was broken down into different pieces. At the center, was a small group of about 300 whom we spent a lot of time working with. These were key people in the media, economic institutions, and the

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government that we wanted to talk with about U.S. policy or simply to mail background material to them.

Beyond that, we had a much larger group of individuals that we would invite to programs and send materials to but would not devote much personalized time to. These included junior professors, younger reporters, people who were coming up but had not yet arrived. They were not members of our “core audience” but were important to us, nonetheless, and certainly were a part of the audience we had to maintain contact with. So we included them on name and address lists. Altogether, we had about 15,000 in the data base for those sorts of individuals throughout Japan.

The operation of the DRS systems always was a controversial topic. Our local staff members helped but were sometimes suspicious, believing that we probably were feeding data collected about individuals back to Washington where it would be used in intelligence or other conspiratorial needs. Of course, nothing of the sort was done, but the more efficient the system and the more productive it was for guidance, the higher the level of local suspicion and anxiety. Some felt uncomfortable with the possibility that personal data on Japanese was possibly being passed outside the country. For most, it was generally all right to keep such information in Tokyo where our local employees had their hands on most of the processes. Efficiencies, such as those offered by the Dentsu arrangement, were understood, but the discomfort was palpable. Technically, it was feasible, and essentially, we had it all set up. All we had to do was sign the contracts to implement a system which, in a limited fashion, would have looked like the Internet does today. Of course, few show much concern about trans-national flows of information today, but at that time, it was a serious problem.

Q: This time in Japan, 1978-82, from your polling what were your particular concerns? Whither the Japanese public vis-a-vis the United States?

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YATES: That was an interesting question. There were a number of Japanese polls, the largest being the Jiji poll which had been done for many years. There is what's called trend data available through the Jiji poll, because they have had the same kinds of questions asked over very many years.

Q: This is a Japanese firm?

YATES: Yes, it is. We would do contracts with the office of research, because I had been in the office of research before and my policy job in Tokyo included research responsibilities. On occasion, I would contract for questions in Japanese polls. For example, "What do you think of the American policy?" "What do you think about the US-Japan-Security Treaty?" The interesting thing was that we could take the results of these published polls and with the new Wang computer, do some reprocessing for results that were important to us. Most important was trend data, looking at similar questions over a longer period of time. The Jiji poll was particularly useful. Mainichi Shimbun and the Yomiuri Shimbun ran similar polls, as did most major Japanese news organizations.

In the aggregate, the poll data on US-Japan relations over the years revealed the basic trends in Japanese thinking on the relations between the two countries. By analyzing data using a technique called regression analysis, you can condense a variety of information into a single graphic representation and reduce uncontrollable variation to reveal the fundamental change in the data over time.

A good example of this was Japanese impressions of America and its relations with the power that had defeated it in the Second World War. For some data, if you looked at it in the short period, you found dramatic rises and falls. This related directly to the events of the day and the nature of the newspaper headlines at the time of the poll. However, if the same data were combined with that from other polls and the data were examined over a longer period of time through the technique of regression, then in a period of about 10 or 15 years, you found a gradual increase in the favorable attitude of the general population.

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There was a lot of press commentary saying Japanese-American relations were going down the tube or was at one extreme or another. The revealed truth in longer period analysis was that the Japanese view of America was fairly stable and positive.

Yet every time there was an incident, such as when a U.S. submarine hit a Japanese trawler, our poll numbers went down sharply. That was in reaction to individual events. When you plotted significant international events in Japanese-American relations, you found they very closely correlated with the mood swings of the Japanese public. But if you did a regression analysis over a longer period of time, it turns out there wasn't much change at all. That was an interesting lesson for those who watch polls here in this country, the famous one being the Dewey/Truman election. They looked at the spikes and didn't look at the trends.

Q: Did you find yourself almost odd man out? Here you were playing with computers in an era when they were just beginning.

YATES: In USIA, computers for some were bad words, as it was throughout the government. I think USIA probably was more receptive to most of this new stuff. Yet for an ambitious Foreign Service Officer, a connection with computers probably had a negative effect on his career. While I believe that the effect of using computers to assist in communication programs had an enormous impact over the years, I don't think I got much credit for it. It was considered out of the mainstream of what a traditional Foreign Service Officer was concerned with. So I tended to get odd jobs. I built the first audience record system in Korea that was based on computer principles. That was in 1968, when I first entered the Foreign Service. I had previously had a lot of computer experience while working my way through university, so the development was a natural one.

Q: At the bank?

YATES: Yes. So I had a base of operational knowledge to work from. When I arrived in Korea, they were struggling with organizing data about the audience and programs. Every

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officer would have a Rolodex on his desk or at least a business card file, and it was on that basis that contacts were developed and managed. The Deputy PAO at the time was Mort Smith, and he had within his responsibilities managing this audience. I suggested we do something with punched cards. We didn't have a computer and could not afford one - but punched cards were available. I told them we could do a "key sort" system, which is based on very primitive physical computer principles.

I drew up plans for a key sort device on a piece of paper and got a local vendor - literally on the street - to build it out of wood. It involved a box into which we put cards which rested on a trap door on the bottom. Also on the street, we located an umbrella repair man and bought umbrella staves from him. We used these as the needles for the key sort system and designed a card that had holes around all the sides. We got a company to drill the cards. You put the person's name and something about them, what kind of audience, academic, government, media, etc.. We coded the area, their interests, etc. We would then use a mechanical punch to cut through from the drilled hole to the edge of the card. Each card could then be coded with notches which opened the hole to the edge. If you put the pin-like staves through the holes pertaining to what you wanted to find out, those which had a punched out notch in the appropriate location would fall from the rest of the cards when the trap door was opened. This was a primitive card sorter. We then would put the selected cards in a mimeograph-based printing machine and printed the name and address onto a piece of paper which you could use to wrap materials to be sent to the audience. Then you put the cards back in the box. Next time you would pick a different group of holes.

Q: My recollection is of an outfit called Royal Mcbee...

YATES: That's right.

Q: It was a knitting needle system and I think it started in 1870. We used it in personnel in the mid-to-late sixties.

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YATES: It was old at the time, but it was good enough to get us off the ground with a machine based system without any real cost. The interesting thing was, in order to make this work, we had to get the information and the names and addresses. That was quite a problem in USIS at the time, because people on the staff were not organized for information with that in mind. We had a Cultural Affairs Officer who was very distinguished and who had very warm and close contacts with some important members of the Korean audience. When the call went out from the Deputy PAO, Mort Smith's office, to give their names and addresses to me for my "machine," this particular Cultural Affairs Officer resisted the concept. He considered his contacts his own and was very reluctant to have them shared with anyone else.

There was a real row in the post about that. He was ordered to give his list to me, and it turned out after all the fuss, he had only about seven names. Whether it was out of indignation over the order to turn over his private set of contacts to the general staff or masking his embarrassment that he had so few genuine contacts, I never was sure, although I did suspect the latter.

The key sort system was a precursor which had become outdated, as you pointed out, and it did not last very long. There were physical problems. First off, there was the problem of transferring the addresses from the cards to paper. Sometimes, not all the cards would drop out; you really had to shake the box hard. The mimeo-based system was clumsy and new cards had to be re-done after only a few uses, because the chemical deposit on the surface of the card wore down to the point that it no longer gave an image adequate for the postal authorities to read.

I heard that the U.S. Army declared some card sorters surplus at Camp Zama in Japan. Under the U.S. procurement system, if any element of the federal system has equipment that is declared surplus, any government agency can lay claim to it before it is put up for sale. So we got the army to agree to give us a card sorter. We had to modify it, because Japan ran on an electric current of 100 volts and 50 Hz. That conversion accomplished,

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we brought it to the office. We then had to punch cards with a key punch which we got locally. We could then prepare standard IBM punch cards, and it then became a real system. We could process a much larger number of audience members and could sort cards quickly to meet desired criteria. One disadvantage to a key sort system is, you can select but you can't sort; you have to do it mechanically unless you do it through a series of selections and then it is all screwed up and you can't put it back in order again. The old IBM card system was much faster. We got it installed, and although it still used a mimeographic address transfer system to prepare selected address lists, it ran for many years after I left.

Q: Back to Japan. In policy planning, besides the more technical side which we have already discussed, were there any other aspects to your work?

YATES: I ran the research part, which was important, because we used the information we developed to govern the use of our resources. Even then in the late seventies, resources available to USIS were declining. There was a question of how many cuts we could take and where to focus our resources. We stepped back and took a look at the physical facilities we had in Japan. How could we best use these facilities to reach a maximum number of people with the greatest amount of information that was going to have the direct utility to them? Questions raised concerned personal contact versus direct mail, versus invitations, versus radio (such as the Voice of America), versus libraries.

The problem of libraries was one of the biggest questions. A book was quite a large investment, and you are never certain anyone is going to read it. However, you are fairly certain people will read direct mail and can often make an assessment based on direct feedback. So we had to make such relative decisions.

A controversial one was how many people could be effectively addressed with this multimillion dollar program in Japan? We did the math backwards. We went back to individual officers, asking how many hours a day an officer could spend with people, given

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the usual office mix of administration, meetings, and the other mechanics of operating in a large organization. Put in a different way, how many people within their assigned duties would they be able to know well? The level of personal intimacy was important. Could you possibly know something about a contact's kids or his wife, and be almost on a first name basis (which you don't do in Japan)? Could you be on a level of friendship with a person, so they would trust you when you went to them with something that was important, an issue they were concerned about? How many could you accommodate on that level? We looked at this really hard, did a lot of talking. We came up with a number, about 30 people that, on average, could be handled at the defined level of closeness. This would be 30 people they could really get to know, to be functional with.

If you multiply that 30 by the number of American officers we had in Tokyo, you came up to something like 300 people. That became a very problematic figure. The 30 individuals for each program person thereby defined the "core group" in the DRS. For our bean counting critics, the charge might be, "You mean you are spending \$5 million a year (or whatever we were spending at the time) on 300 people?" This would be leveled by congressional staffers who looked at our program in Japan. "You can't do that. You have this big operation and you are only talking to 300 people? That is outrageous." On the other hand, if those were the right 300 people in Japan, it would be worth putting all of our resources onto them. But that, of course, is not the way people look at things in Washington. The earlier PPBS (Program Planning and Budgeting System) was tried in earnest, but was not in place so very long. Neither was "Zero-Based Budgeting."

Real or imagined questions soon got out of hand for each of these systems. Some asked to assess the value of the operation, based on how many people saw your movie, or attended programs, or visited the library. Under PPBS, I remember during my time in Korea we would show movies to assembled audiences containing all sorts of people. For example, we might show three movies to 50 people in one sitting. What was our contact? The total reported under PPBS was 150, but I only had 50 people attending. The formula we were requested to apply asked for a count for each screening. One film shown to 50

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people counted 50, but three films shown to 50 at one time counted 150. How this could quickly get out of hand seemed obvious, and there was no assessment of the quality of either the audience or of the impact those films had on their viewers.

Q: When the Carter administration came in, there was a great deal of emphasis on the zero-based budget, too. This was the buzz word of the time.

YATES: That's right. This was not the first time and downsizing (although we didn't have that word then) was very much alive in Japan in the late '70s. We were talking about cutting branches and reducing the budget by 15-20 percent. One of the things I had to do was to look at the program and make suggestions for where we might cut at various funding levels. If we got a 5 percent cut, where would the axe fall? If we got a 10 percent cut, what would be eliminated? Twenty percent cuts were unimaginable, but we were forced to consider the possibility. From one year to the next, we never knew what we were going to have in the next budget. It was a silly way to run a railroad, and much of the time spent in such sterile exercises would have been much better spent in developing contacts or better programs.

One of the most strongly attacked parts of the system was the libraries, because collections of books absorb an enormous amount of resources in staff, plant, and investment - you had to keep your libraries current. Technology was changing libraries a lot even then. Microfiche was a buzz word. It is probably gone now, replaced by computers, but at that time microfiche was a big fad in library science. So the question was, do we buy a lot of microfiche materials for our libraries? If so, how do we reduce our book collection in order to offset the cost of the new materials and the associated readers? We had a library in every one of our centers, absorbing about a third of our budget. The question was, were they paying off with a third of the return?

The simple answer was "no". The complicated answer was "maybe". The presence of the library in a community gave an institutional face to the whole operation. It would be difficult

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to justify in local terms having a government operative in their midst going to universities, if he is a propagandist passing out U.S. government brochures. But if he is the director of the library, that is good, because that is passive and something people want to have, a resource for the community. Few wish to strike up close relations with someone whose only justification is to sell a point of view.

However, if you are the head of a library, a source for learning and students, you are accepted, even welcomed. So as cachet, a way of defining ourselves in the interest of the communities, the library is very valuable. But that is hard to convince somebody who runs a budget. The libraries cost x number of dollars. How many people use them? We had to keep statistics on how many people walked through the doors, but that didn't indicate what they read. Even those who came to our programs held in the library were counted. It was a real game. Unfortunately, at that time we were examining our navel on this one without looking at the larger questions and understanding them and being able to articulate them to those making the decisions in Washington. We just did the numbers and aggregated the numbers worldwide. Later, Charlie Wick's "billions of people watching TV in Europe on Worldnet," was the illogical result of what was supposed to be a scientific approach to the problem. The logic and its science were flawed and led to a flawed conclusion. Instead of looking at the context, they were looking at the volume and that wasn't very useful.

While I was in Japan, we did another thing with our new computer. One of my duties there was to help people apply new technology to make our traditional programs stronger. We knew the library system needed a shot in the arm. First, on our new WANG VS-100 we created an interlibrary loan system, so that all of our library holdings could be accounted for centrally. If someone in Fukuoka wanted something on a particular topic, foreign relations in the U.S. or the Korean war, he could ask the librarian in Fukuoka what was available here in Tokyo, as well as all the other branches in Japan. That meant we could reduce our holdings countrywide. Maybe Osaka would be a center for trade, Sapporo, the center for American history, etc. We could specialize our libraries, and we would then have

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to buy only one copy of a “must have” title. This would save us some money. I did that in COBOL at the time.

Q: COBOL being?

YATES: Common Business Oriented Language. That is the old fashioned stuff that has for the most part disappeared or has been transformed into the “C” or “C++” programming language and now has returned to being so much in vogue because we are trying to get the year 2000 (Y2K) problem straightened out. I programed the new inter-library loan system with something like 5000 strings of code to provide reports and other data for the different branches. We would periodically update them. At the same time, we had another problem with our libraries: to get people to use them. If you are going to survive in a period of cuts, you must keep attendance numbers up. We devised a direct mail “outreach” system, a way of making the target audience aware of what we had available. In the traditional approach, you make up a list of materials and send it out to your library patrons. That wasn't good enough, because we didn't have enough library patrons who were members of the all important “core group.” That group was generally too occupied with business or government to have time to visit our libraries, so were not members.

Therefore, we created an outreach system where, instead of sending out a list on American history, for example, to all on the library patron list, we chose instead to approach only those we thought most interested in the subject. Our full country audience was about 15,000, but obviously, not all would be interested in American history. Maybe 50 or 100 at best. American History is a narrow field, particularly in Japan. On the other hand, we may have had 4000 in our target audience who would have a special interest in the discipline of economics.

Since our DRS was categorized by topical areas, we were able to ask the libraries to make up a list of recently received materials (no more than 15 or 20) in a certain subject area. They would decide what good materials they had in that area new books, new magazines,

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etc. We then used our WANG VS-100 to find out how many people in our audience had an interest in the selected topic. Once we had a workable number of individuals to “target” for the selected materials, we would send the instructions to a contractor who, with the specially prepared form, would list the selected materials and mail the announcement to those names topically selected.

The recipient would then look over the listed materials, select up to an allowed four, and return a tear-off portion of the form to the nearest USIS branch for them to respond with the indicated items. The return reply form was postage paid and, once torn off from the listing, would fold up into a format that was acceptable to the Japanese mails. On the reverse side of the completed return form was the original mailing address, so the only part the recipient would have to complete would be the check-off blocks indicating which of the items he or she desired. Completing the form by the recipient was designed to be fairly quick and easy, so as to minimize the effort needed to complete the process. Within four or five days, they would get an envelope back with the ordered materials.

For example, suppose we wanted to do something on our trade imbalance with Japan. Once a topic was decided, within 14 days we would have completed an entire cycle, including the target group selection, addressing, mailing the outreach announcement, the response by the recipient, and the return of the ordered materials. Of course, once the topic and materials were selected and the contractor put to work to mail out the announcement, we would reproduce the listed materials in sufficient numbers to cover the anticipated response and send those copies out to the branches, depending on their proportion of the target audience. We were able to use drivers and other people who were not working on immediate tasks to receive the responses and assemble the orders.

Thus, the materials would get to the target audience in the shortest time possible. The assumption was that if we could respond in a rapid fashion, the person ordering the materials would still remember his or her request and therefore have a better chance of actually reading the materials than one to whom the materials were sent blindly.

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We got an average response about 15 percent for each of our mailings and sometimes it was as high as 20-30 percent on economics. But that was very high. It meant that we were getting primary material that we had selected into the hands of people that we had selected. This is a fairly high average rate for unsolicited materials, but because we had carefully selected the target group as one which we knew to be particularly interested in the materials, our high success rate could be explained.

We did not bother people with materials they did not want. Ideally, each time the recipients found the outreach flyer in their mail, they would be conditioned to recognize it as something they would be interested in. If they were not interested in American history, they would not get anything on American history. If they were not interested in the environment, they would not have to read that. But if they were interested in economics, they got the economics material.

The whole outreach process revealed a couple of other things. It quickly showed that our libraries were not always up to speed in those areas with the highest priority in our country plan. The country plan now applied to the libraries. We were beginning to get the pieces of the program to fit together under this single outreach, or "alert," as we called it in Japan. I don't know if it is still running, but it did run for a good number of years. It was very easy to do. It didn't involve very many people. It involved one librarian, at least, who would develop a list of materials. It involved writing up those materials in a summarized form, typing them into the computer, and sending them over to the contractor with the characteristics of the audience wanted; the contractor did everything else. They even mailed the alert.

A blank form, which was the frame for all "alerts," was pre-printed and on hand with the contractor. Only the printing of the selected names and addresses and the special list of materials was necessary before it could go in the mail. Then, all we did was to reproduce all the materials and make sure the branches had enough, so that they could then distribute them directly to the audience when they mailed in their requests. The mail cycle of addressing and mailing gave us enough time to reproduce and distribute on the

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first cut. The stuffing of envelopes was done in each branch and mailed directly to the audience in its area. After the order was received, the clerk who stuffed the envelopes would separate the order form into two parts, that with the actual order and the part with the return address of the person who did the ordering. The original target's address did double duty. It was used with spray-on adhesive to address the package of materials, so we could avoid the additional work needed to address the envelope to the target member. The remaining piece of the original order form had printed on it the membership number of the target recipient and the actual order form on which the ordered materials were selected, so we had a full record of the transaction to keep a running tally of our effort.

Q: What were the principal problems USIA found in dealing with the Japanese where we wanted to try to get them to understand our position?

YATES: Among a variety of trade problems were the major items of beef and oranges. We had a citrus problem in Japan. The Japanese grew their own citrus, called "mikan" - a small, very sweet tangerine, and prohibited or prevented, through tariff and non-tariff barriers, the importation of American citrus products. American beef was not imported into Japan. While beef was an important U.S. agricultural product, the Japanese would not buy American beef, because they had their own beef industry. Japanese "Kobe" beef was very expensive, and they didn't want to have competition from the grass-fed American beef, because it tasted better and was a heck of a lot cheaper. The Australians were selling flank steak to the Japanese, which also was much cheaper than Kobe beef that was raised on imported grain and sometimes hand massaged to increase the fat content. So we had those two major trade problems.

We also had the automotive imbalance, of course. At that time, Japanese cars were getting hot in the US, and they were making enormous strides in sales of automobiles, while we were doing nothing in Japan, mainly because of what were non-tariff barriers. For example, a shipment of General Motors cars came to Yokohama but were all impounded at the dock and could not be released for sale. The reason was the amount of light in the

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rear lights that leaked between the area of light that was the brake light and the area of the light that was not the brake light. Under Japanese law as interpreted by the customs officials, that was not allowed. The problem had nothing to do with the safety of the car, its reliability or its value. It was purely a non-tariff barrier which the Japanese customs people could use at the port of entry.

The folks at GM had no idea such a law existed but had to retro-fit all the imported cars with a special gasket in the taillight to prevent light from leaking from one chamber to the other. This example is indicative of the kinds of things that we were up against. A similar kind of tempest in a teapot also occurred regarding “medfly” on U.S. apples going to Japan.

In addition, we had a military problem. About 32,000 American GI's were resident in Japan, principally in Okinawa. There was a constant battle over the presence of those GI's and their tendency to get into trouble in the social life that tends to swirl around military bases. We had a training site on the side of Mt. Fuji which was always a sensitive issue, because Mt. Fuji was considered to be a Japanese national symbol and we were shooting artillery shells into the mountain. That, of course, raised sensitive feelings, particularly on the part of the Japanese who were uncomfortable with our presence.

And then there was the problem of noise generated by military aircraft. This was a special problem at those bases where carrier aircraft were moved when a carrier was in port at Yokosuka. Since those large ships could not conduct operations while in port, pilots would have to maintain flight status and keep up training schedules from alternate sites. Of special concern was night flying. Military emergencies may occur at any time, day or night, and the pilots needed night flying experience. However, the people who were aroused at 2:00 am by the roar of the jets taking off and landing at Yokosuka Air Base or other military bases could not be expected to be sympathetic to the military need. American military aircraft don't have the noise abatement fittings that commercial aircraft do. As housing

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developments pressed closer and closer to U.S. military installations, the problems increased.

If that was not enough, there were nuclear problems as well. Over the past several decades, nuclear power became increasingly prevalent in major American ships. The Japanese had a nuclear phobia and were unhappy with American nuclear powered vessels showing up in their ports. The Japanese' three no's - no production, no holding, and no use of nuclear weapons - were a symptom of this particular nuclear phobia. They would give us a lot of trouble on that, and there was always a question of whether American warships that visited Yokosuka were carrying nuclear weapons. The Japanese had the right to ask, but chose not to, thus most times successfully avoiding the problem. But those were serious questions.

Perhaps you remember the soybean incident during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, when he cut off the supply of soybeans to Japan? The soybean and its various products represent an important staple in the Japanese diet. Tofu, for example, is made from soy, and everybody uses soy sauce in Japanese cooking. Some Buddhists and other vegetarians eat practically nothing but tofu. When Japan is not self-sufficient in soybean products, and when, during the Carter years, it was decided to stop supplying Japan because of official pique over trade difficulties, the Japanese went into shock. They realized how dependent they were on outside sources for something that was very, very important to their diet and did not like the feeling of insecurity.

A related issue is rice. American rice is very good - as a matter of fact, in the opinion of some, better than Japanese rice in terms of taste and quality. However, in Japan with arable land at a premium and rapidly diminishing because of the pressures for housing or other more profitable uses for open land, rice production sharply declined. Perhaps in part because of the shock of the soybean crisis, the Japanese attitude toward self-sufficiency in rice became much more rigid. They clearly felt that something so vital for national survival should be fully supplied from domestic production. That led to very high

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price supports for rice farmers and an astronomical cost of rice in the market. U.S. rice was much cheaper, but the Japanese felt deeply enough about the problem to continue to pay a very high premium for their rice simply to avoid a situation where they would be beholden to foreigners for the supply of such an important staple. The import of rice was completely banned.

The extremes to which this particular paranoia could be taken can be found in the prohibition of the import of wild rice. While a grain, wild rice is not rice but a completely different product that the Japanese do not grow. Still, since it contained the term “rice” in its description, it was fully banned as an import into Japan. For a long time, the prohibition against the importation of rice has cost the Japanese taxpayer dearly. Politically, however, the Japanese voter accepted the burden as the cost of retaining “food independence” and to avoid the national embarrassment that the soybean shock had created.

Those were the principal issues that faced the bilateral relationship during my tenure in Tokyo. From time to time, other minor things would come and go as immediate issues. Nonetheless, we had definite public affairs problems, all of which were to be addressed through the methods I have described: the outreach, the alert system mailings, the DRS to design the audience around these issues, so we could target the Japanese press and media.

Not all of the problems in Tokyo were of a bilateral nature. One special kind of experience occurred when a CODEL (congressional delegation) came into town. CODELs came and went through Tokyo all the time, and they were always playing to their home audiences while they were in Tokyo. A congressman from the mid-west would come and have no interest in what the Japanese were thinking, but only in what impression his constituents might receive while he was in the news from overseas. Ostensibly addressing the international press on international questions, he would actually be speaking, not to the press in Japan, but to his constituents back home. That always led the Japanese to great seizures of angst about “what are the Americans saying now? Is this a trial balloon? What

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are they trying to tell us?" We would explain to Japanese journalists that we were trying to tell them nothing. This was simply a Congressman on a junket in Japan but talking to his or her folks back home. So don't worry about what he says, and particularly do not take what he said as indicative of the attitude of the American government. The Japanese didn't understand this and always felt they were missing something.

One time, Steve Solarz from New York came into town. We got a call from the embassy political section one afternoon, saying that Congressman Solarz was in town staying at the Okura Hotel and wanted to see me, because he understood that I had poll data on Japanese opinions. I asked what information he was interested in, and he said he wanted to see the data. I responded that I could pull together all the information on a specific subject and save time for him, but he insisted he wanted to see all the data in its raw form. I had about six large, bound books of data, so I picked them up and took them to the Congressman's room at the Okura Hotel. I sat for a couple of hours in Solarz's hotel room while he went through the books page by page. I was dumbfounded. Once in a while he would ask a question. He was an intelligent, careful observer of this information and was actually reading the data with an analyst's eye. For me, this was a revelation, because I had never expected a member of the American Congress to be interested or capable of absorbing information at that level. Whether or not this was the best use of his time was a bit beside the point. He evidently wanted to see the raw data unedited and undigested by others.

Q: I am interviewing Steve Solarz now, mainly on Africa. His way of operating was to go to a place, have people lined up for him, and then he would also talk to other people. He would vacuum up everything. During the period I am interviewing him for now, he was chairman of the subcommittee on Africa; then he went to the subcommittee on the Far East. But he could talk with tremendous knowledge, because he talked to everybody and did the things you are saying. So he was able to draw on real data and real contact.

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Sometimes he could be a pain in the ass, because he wanted to be everywhere, but I think he was also respected, because he did what you are saying.

YATES: Although I spent a lot of time in the Foreign Service, I had only the slightest contact with American Congressmen. Solarz, with his evident hunger for straight data, was an exception. Of course, the reason was that I had the data he was interested in. I did have respect for Solarz, although there were a number of CODELs that I had no respect for.

One such instance occurred while I was in Afghanistan. Lester Wolf from New York came to Kabul. An interesting man. My recollection is that he was only there about six hours. He was interested in drugs, illicit narcotics. The embassy had made several discoveries in the area of interdicting narcotics and had come to an arrangement with the Afghan government on the means to handle such investigations. They held announcement of the new arrangements off, to wait for his arrival so that he could attend a show and tell about the progress that was being made. At the news conference, he said, "I came to Afghanistan, and despite all these bureaucrats, I broke the log-jam in the narcotics problems here in Afghanistan." Such a grab for the glory that was based on the hard work of others did not endear him to the hearts of the people who had done so much to make it possible for him to be a part of the final success while he was in town.

That kind of offhand treatment of Foreign Service and other officials working abroad is something that happened very, very often. I saw congressmen and even their staffers coming through, using embassy resources and then spitting on the people who had done so much to help them and made sure their visit was successful. Following an overseas visit where every effort was made to make their visit productive and comfortable, members of the Congress would turn around and criticize imagined standards of living abroad or such things as the "booze budget," the funding needed to provide receptions and food to visitors on such occasions as the Fourth of July. They simply were feeding stereotypes at home to make it appear that they were champions of stringent budgetary guidelines, but

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the cost of one CODEL far exceeded representational events where real governmental business was transacted to the benefit of American business or the taxpayer.

Of course, there were people in the government who were not like that. In the Carter administration, there was Jodie Powell, whom I had some association with while he was at the G-7 in Tokyo. Normally, when a presidential visit would occur, we would have to supply materials, and everybody in the embassy would take a different part of responsibility. In USIS, one of our responsibilities was to prepare Wireless File materials, a news service we provided to the mission. Included in the Wireless File were summaries of public opinion in the host country and of world events in other areas. The basic service was to keep the presidential party abreast of what was going on and what the local press was saying about the visit. Naturally, USIS would also handle incoming foreign press and briefings and interviews.

Powell was particularly good, because he was accessible. Each day, I would put together the local media reaction plus wireless file materials and get it over to his office. He worked in the basement of the Okura Hotel, which was a hotel next to the U.S. Embassy, so it was easy for us to access. He had a windowless office in the basement, about 7 feet by 8 feet. A very small office, it had just enough room for a desk and a chair. He was always in this office reading. The rest of his people often were pushy and insufferable. But he was smart, capable, knew what he was talking about, didn't waste time, and was always respectful of people who were trying to help him. That was very important for those of us who were grinding out the information.

On the other hand, some of the advance people, in particular, were not very smart. Political advance teams that come out, even for presidential visits, are not always the best and brightest. They were often campaign workers who were given an overseas trip as a reward for their campaign work. I recall one member of the advance team for the Carter visit to Japan that was supposed to be at the airport at a certain time; embassy officials couldn't find him. They were supposed to go to the airport, bring him in, brief him, and get

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him set up for his work. He had disappeared in Tokyo. After an exasperated search, they finally discovered him in Tokyo.

The story was he had gotten to Narita, gotten off the airplane with his backpack, and went into the terminal to find transportation into the city. Not knowing that he would be met, and evidently not appearing to be of presidential advance team caliber to those who were tasked with meeting him, he checked the cost of a taxi to Tokyo, which was astronomical, and the fare for the airport bus, which was evidently too much as well. So he hitchhiked along the expressway back into Tokyo. He put out his thumb out and got a ride. The great amount of effort spent to track him down because of his ignorance of how things are done created much frustration, a quick spreading story, and did little to encourage respect for the incoming presidential advance team.

There was another incident with the Carter advance team at the time of that visit. As usual with such trips, the President had one schedule and Rosalyn Carter had another. One of the things she was going to do was visit Kyoto and one of the gardens there; I believe it was Ryoanji. The young lady responsible for that part of the trip traveled to Kyoto to set up the visit. She took one look at the stone garden and said this would not do. She wanted carpeting put on the rocks, so that when Rosalyn came and walked out into the garden, she wouldn't slip on the rocks. It took a lot of tall talking to get the advance team to understand that this would not be something that would be possible, because of Japanese sensitivity to the aesthetics of the location. The advance team fought long and hard on that principal, but finally relented when it became evident that the Japanese and the embassy, would not budge.

During the visit, Carter was to make a major speech on economics. Somebody in the bowels of the White House wrote the speech. I don't know who it was, but he or she knew nothing about Japan, its culture or its sensitivities. Luckily, we got an advance copy, took one look, and knew it wouldn't fly. In the last hours before the speech was given, we had to literally rip the whole thing apart and rewrite from sentence one, because it was so crudely

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written. One wonders how the government manages to keep things connected at home. On the road, it is evident that things fall apart quickly.

When we have had important officials abroad, more than a few times the saving grace has been some poor guy sitting out in the brush who knew the situation and could say, "No, no, don't do this. You are going to screw it up." As we downsize and shut facilities, as we remove people, there are fewer and fewer experienced people to do this, and the logic would be that we are going to make more and more mistakes, as, I guess we did, on the recent trip to China.

Q: Carter got hit by the press at least twice. Once was in Poland and another time was making a remark about Montezuma's revenge in Mexico City. Neither went down very well.

YATES: You have to have somebody with local ears, local eyes, and local feelings to be able to say "Don't say that," or "I think, Mr. President, that isn't quite what you mean," and correct it on the spot. If you wait for three days, you are lost. You do a lot of damage and negate a lot of the effort that has gone on and millions of dollars that were spent to try to get people to understand American policy and attitudes. And, more importantly, to understand that the American people have respect for people in that country. A presidential slip, a gaffe by one who is speaking for the American people, can undercut a lot of good will that has been established. Maintaining goodwill sells American products, which means American jobs back home, and builds our own reputation abroad as an important place in the world. So as we are shutting down, we are losing this currency.

Q: How did you find living in Japan as, say, compared to Korea?

YATES: The physical aspects of living in Japan?

Q: Just operating within Japan.

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YATES: Japan is different, light years away from Korea. During my time in Japan, I went over to Seoul on consultation only once. Since I had been in Japan for some time and other places before that, I had lost my sense of the Korean environment. When I stepped off the plane, it was immediately apparent. You could just feel the difference, a sense that the air is different. The reason, I believe, is in the attitude of the people. The Japanese don't feel comfortable with physical contact. They aren't comfortable with a relationship that gets you too close to their personal lives. It is all right to have an official relationship, and they are very happy with that and are wonderful friends, but if you get too close on the personal side, they are uncomfortable, because you don't fit into the Japanese scheme of things. For example, there have been many, many books written on the difference between the Japanese and other culture's business practices, and these are best sellers in Japan so that their readers may feel more comfortable when traveling abroad.

Koreans, on the other hand, are physical. They are in your face. They are much more open and you can joke and carry on - to a point - with a more relaxed feeling than you could in Japan. On a Seoul street, you get bumped into and no one will say, "I am sorry." In Tokyo, it is a great crisis. If they bump you on the street, they bow and are very apologetic. A Japanese friend and I had formed an international club, the International House. We brought in speakers from different embassies and had a cultural exchange. He was a very quiet and personable man and has since died of a heart attack.

Before I left Japan, he invited me to lunch to say goodbye. It was a nice, pleasant restaurant at one of the smaller hotels in Tokyo on a side street. We were sitting eating, when all of a sudden I crunched down on a piece of glass in my rice. I put it on the side of my plate and ate the other things. My friend asked, "What is the matter with the rice?" I replied, "I think there is glass in it." "We probably should say something or someone else may be hurt eating the same rice." So he called the waiter over, and he asked what was the matter. "My friend here found glass in his rice," he said. The poor waiter almost fainted on the spot. He picked up my plate and rushed off to the kitchen and bedlam ensued. The

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chef, the restaurant manager, the hotel manager, waitresses - everybody on the staff - suddenly appeared, bowing and almost knocking their heads on the floor saying, "This is unacceptable. We run a good restaurant and are deeply sorry."

In fact, my friend got away with a complete free meal, because when we left, there was no charge. The whole staff turned out to say goodbye in the parking lot and once again apologize. There was a great intensity in everyone's apologies. In a good American restaurant, the waiter might say, "I'm sorry, I will bring you a fresh dish and you will not be charged," and you might even receive an apology from the manager. I would not expect the entire staff to turn out in a display of contrition. But in Japan, there was an extreme sense of embarrassment. My friend said if we had not been cordially treated, we could have simply picked up the phone and called the health officials in Tokyo, and they would have come and closed the restaurant, because an infraction of that type could cause a serious health problem if left unaddressed. A much less dramatic but similar situation can be seen if you buy something in a Japanese store. The clerks spend minutes wrapping up a relatively cheap purchase. The Japanese do things with a different sense of aesthetics and responsibility, which I think is sometimes surprising to westerners who are accustomed to a more casual approach to service. But the Japanese consider it important and necessary.

Q: How did you wife feel about being Korean in Japan? Was this a problem?

YATES: Yes. One of the dark sides of Japan is that they are not as racially tolerant as most of rest of the world. This is true for much of Asia. We had a problem when I was in Kwangju with the black GI's. In the late '60s, American blacks felt they were deeply wronged in the US, and if they could only get outside of this country, things would be okay. We had black GI's at the air base in Kwangju who would go off base, thinking they had finally gotten away from this racist society and run right smack into a racial antagonism which was far deeper than anything they had encountered in the US. It caused severe psychological problems for the black GI's in Kwangju and the military brought in a

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psychiatrist to handle them. The military were very uncomfortable, since at one time, they had a policy of not sending any black GI's to Korea because of the racial tension, but that was no longer an acceptable course of action. Korea had not changed, however, and the problem persisted.

A similar effect could be seen in Japan. The Japanese are more sophisticated, perhaps, because there is a basic cultural attitude not to confront people or things directly. This leads to the image that all is fine. But under the surface, there are powerful feelings that have deep cultural roots. The Japanese do not like Koreans, and the feeling is passionately reciprocated. Up until very recently, they fingerprinted all ethnic Koreans resident in Japan, even though they have never been in Korea and don't speak Korean and may be a second- or third-generation Japanese citizen. They were still considered "gaijin" (foreigners) and had to have an alien registration card. So how did this basic animosity affect us?

The first reaction of Japanese who are not internationally experienced when seeing an Asian woman with an American man is to assume that they are an American GI and a Japanese bar girl. That is a hard image to get over. Once they discovered I am not a GI and she is not a bar girl, it was all right, but she is still Korean. From a distance, my wife would appear Japanese to most people in Japan. It is only when she comes closer that they will recognize that she is Korean. Americans probably wouldn't notice the differences. There are differences in cheek bone, in the color of the hair, and in the length of the thigh bone, due to the respective national diets. In Korea, there is much more calcium in the usual diet, as well as a larger quantity of vegetables and less salt.

When my wife went into a shop, if they weren't paying attention, the sales people were very warm and treated her like just another Japanese customer, but if they recognized her as a Korean, they became very cool. That caused some problems, although I think my wife was usually comfortable there because, generally speaking, the Japanese don't make a point of differences unless they are forced to confront you directly. If you are in

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an environment with them, they are oblivious to you, even as they are oblivious to other Japanese. Their houses are enclosed by walls, and they keep a very intensely private area. Japanese architecture and the shape of a Japanese garden focus internally. You don't buy a Japanese house for the view, you buy it for the garden and focus internally.

They do this in their personal relations, which made her tense. Westerners, the round-eye, long-nose type of person, are treated more like children: cute in their own way and distant from intimate Japanese concerns. A Westerner who speaks a little Japanese is adored. It is a wonderful feeling, you are coddled, they fawn over you...to a point. The point comes when the foreigner's Japanese gets good enough that it is no longer a barrier to communication. No longer cute, a foreigner who speaks Japanese well must be made to fit into the social fabric, even to allow discourse to proceed. Of course, that is virtually impossible without a long residence and acquaintance with the Japanese person encountered.

A good friend of mine who has been a professor of Japanese language and literature for a number of years and whom I served with in Hokkaido when I was in the army, married a Japanese girl, whom I also knew. A very fine woman. They went back to the United States, and he studied Japanese and became very proficient. They returned to Japan where he studied in Kyoto as a researcher in the Japanese language. He told me that he found the Japan he returned to very, very different from the Japan he had left as a GI. The reason was that his Japanese had improved to the point where it was no longer something that separated him from Japanese society. The problem in Kyoto was that the Japanese now were cold and distant. At the point that he no longer had a barrier in communication with them, he had to be categorized within their system. He could never become Japanese. Sort of like those Hawaiians who become sumo wrestlers. They are wrestlers, but they are always gaijin. Some become Japanese citizens, but they are always gaijin.

The problem for my Japanese speaking friend was that he found his experience in Japan not so much distasteful but much, much harder, because the Japanese he met did not

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know where to classify him. The Japanese carry business cards which give a lot more information than we probably would have on our business cards. But this is because you must be placed in the system, so people will know how to talk to you, how to relate to you, and what kind of a relationship they should maintain with you. When you are a cute, stumbling gaijin, it is easy. If you are a Japanese person, you don't let your daughter talk to those male foreigners, but it is all right to socialize in a remote sort of way. You invite them out, entertain them, give them gifts. Everything is fine. It is much as it would be with foreign visitors here. But when you become closer, the relationship changes. Maybe it is true for immigrants here who, after living in an American town for a while, become one of the people but are still seen as different. It then becomes harder for them, since they feel at home but not really comfortable.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy?

YATES: The ambassador during my whole tour in Japan was Mike Mansfield. He was there for more than ten years. Mansfield was a phenomenon. He had more energy than almost anyone else in the office. As I mentioned before, USIS was on the second floor and had big windows that stretched across the entrance. I could walk down the hall and see Mike coming and going. He had a spry step, getting into and out of the car. I guess he must have been about 80 at the time. An amazing man.

When I installed the Wang VS-100 computer at the post, we were very proud of the accomplishment and wanted the ambassador to come and officially begin its operation. We arranged for a photographer, and I had a special terminal set up in my office for him to use. He was going to go to it and touch a key and it would say "Welcome Mr. Ambassador." So we brought him to the second floor. I still have a picture of him sitting at the terminal, holding up his hand and saying, "What now?" That was because he had pressed the key and the screen went blank. We had tested this repeatedly before, and it always had been fine. My guess is, when he sat down at the terminal, he leaned on the

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table or something like that, and the cable at the back had come loose. But Mike was a great guy and never lost his cool. He always called me "Ted," although I can't think why.

He also had great influence among the Japanese. First of all, they knew he was very well connected in the Democratic Party and Washington. He was very credible in interpreting the mood of Congress to the Japanese. But he would also do things differently. In his office, for instance, he was famous. When he would invite a guest in, he would say, "Would you like some coffee?" Of course, the Japanese always had coffee and would say, "Sure." He would say, "If you will just wait a moment, please." He would walk into a little small Pullman kitchen on the side of his office there, and he would make the coffee and serve it. To a Japanese bureaucrat or an official who is waited on by flocks of young office girls, coffee or tea comes automatically; you don't ask. The fact that the Ambassador got up and made and served the coffee became sort of a social bit of cachet in Tokyo those who had coffee made for them by the American ambassador. He used little things like that to great effect. He obviously knew what he was doing. It was a nice touch.

We had a particularly difficult incident in which Mansfield was especially effective. It was on the occasion when a Japanese trawler went down. We had a roaring time with the press; they were taking us apart.

Q: Just for the record a submarine surfaced...

YATES: The submarine was coming up, and the conning tower hit the bottom of a trawler and it sank. The submarine crew did not realize they had hit the small trawler. Three Japanese crewmen lost their lives in that incident.

We were getting roasted by the Japanese press on it. Ambassador Mansfield singlehandedly turned the entire incident off. The way he did that was to get his picture taken by the press with one of the surviving families. In the picture, he was standing before the family bowing and apologizing for the incident. The whole episode instantly vanished as an issue. It was no longer relevant. He had the sensitivity to understand that one single

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act was what was needed. By making the apology, the matter was concluded. Sort of like my friend's ear in Afghanistan. It was over, and the Japanese got back to business again. An interesting bit of sensitivity exhibited by the grizzled old coal miner.

Mansfield was an interesting ambassador to work for. I didn't work for him directly, although I had opportunities to go sit in on the country team meetings. In the morning, he would come into the meeting briskly, once everyone was in place. Everyone soon learned not to be late for one of his meetings, for they never lasted very long. He would brook no shuffling of feet or mumbling or carrying on. He would come in and say, "What's up?" If everyone said everything was okay, he would say, "It sounds good," and get up and leave. When there was discussion and you indicated you had something to say, hesitation would cost you the chance and he would go on to the next person. As a result, Mansfield's country team meetings rarely went longer than 15 - 20 minutes. His philosophy was, if you have something to say, say it; if not, shut up and let us get on with other business. He also had an enormous capacity for statistics and numbers. At a briefing, he could spill out trade numbers and problems at a level of detail that would knock the socks off the press people. An amazing person and a very, very good ambassador, I think.

When the administration changed, the mainly Republican business community in Tokyo was fully of the opinion that they wanted Mansfield to stay. Which important Republican politician wanted to come to Tokyo was immaterial, because Mansfield was so good in maintaining contacts with the Japanese and keeping everything on an even keel, that they didn't want to lose that capability. He remained there for many years.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. You left Japan in 1982. Where did you go?

YATES: To Iceland.

Q: I guess you became an island specialist after Japan.

YATES: That's right.

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Q: We will pick it up then.

YATES: Good.

Q: Today is April 11, 1997. Ken, we are in Iceland. Is this a normal assignment or one requested?

YATES: This was sort of an odd situation. I was getting ready to move on to another assignment from Tokyo when I got a call asking if I would be willing to go to Iceland as Public Affairs Officer. Being a PAO in my business is something you very much want to become. It gives you the opportunity to design your own program, to struggle with the many details of communicating with your audience, and to get a seat in the discussions of policy. I had no previous wish or thought of ever going to Iceland on assignment. I didn't know much about it. The situation was that my predecessor there had evidently run into some rough waters with the ambassador and was coming out rather quickly. They needed someone to go in right away who they thought could put some oil on the troubled waters.

Q: I might add that often diplomacy is more within an embassy or a consulate or in the Department of State.

YATES: That is certainly true. The case in point was the ambassador at the time.

Q: Who was that?

YATES: It was Marshall Bremont, who had previously had experience with USIA. He had been a PAO in Indonesia many years before, so he knew USIA work and had some very clearly defined ideas of what a Public Affairs Officer should do for him. His concepts and expectations obviously were not being met by my predecessor.

The embassy in Iceland was in a unique position, although this is not unusual, but for a European country perhaps it is. Much of the embassy's work was public affairs. The

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reason was that our major connection with Iceland was political and related to our image rather than the more tangible issues typical of most embassies. Certainly among the major factors was not bilateral trade, because Iceland was too small to be a significant trading partner. Its principal export, salted fish, had no market in the US, and its resources were mainly in hydro and thermal power, something that does not transport easily. One of its most famous exports, natural wool sweaters, proved too warm for much of the climate in the US. Tourism had leap-frogged over Iceland with the advent of long range jets which allowed non-stop travel between the U.S. and European capitals. Iceland had been a major stopover on the trans-Atlantic routes in the days of the propeller airplanes which could not carry enough fuel to make the leap in one hop.

In fact, our automobile companies had sort of abandoned Iceland. Whereas they had sold virtually every car on the road in Iceland up to a few years previously, at the time I served there, the Japanese had taken over the automobile business. The Icelandic market was just too small to bother with. GM, for instance, covered Iceland from its sales office in Greece. Iceland didn't export much to the U.S. except sweaters and some artifacts.

Iceland is an unusual country. Icelanders claim to have the oldest, continuous parliament in the world. The Danes invaded and took control in the 1400s and for a while there, it was a breach in the Icelandic democracy. But in spirit, they have a pretty good claim to being one of the record holders. There is still very deep seated resentment, I think, toward the Danes because of their occupation. Danish used to be their official language, but they scotched that very quickly. In some curious way, the Icelandic experience parallels that of Korea where the Japanese took over and changed things like language, the economy, and the educational system.

Q: Just as an historical note, the Danes came in when and why?

YATES: I'm not certain of the exact date. They came in as part of their empire building. Iceland is a northern European society. Their roots are old Norse. Without much argument,

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it is the oldest language in continual use in Europe. A modern Icelander can pick up the sagas, which are some of Europe's oldest recorded history. The Icelandic "skalds" (loosely translated as poets) wrote some of the earliest history preserved in Europe. They had nothing else to do up there, I guess, except to learn to read and write. And they did that. Most Icelanders consider themselves to be at least amateur poets, authors, artists, or having some other skill concerned with the arts. They have a very strong affinity for the arts. They have a parliament called the Althing which is very old. It goes way, way back to when the chiefs of the different tribes on the islands would get together and have what was essentially a parliament to make provisions for the governance of the entire community. Icelanders feel very strongly that theirs is an important contribution to the democratic tradition. It is a fascinating place to be. The more I studied it, the more profound the history became. Then again, perhaps something similar can be said about most cultures.

Q: You were there from 1982 until when?

YATES: Until 1985: three years. Iceland is technically in Europe but is positioned about half way across the North Atlantic a very critical place and why public relations are so important there. During the Cold War, much of the Soviet strength was in the Kola Peninsula which sticks up north of Europe. The only outlets from the peninsula without crossing other national boundaries are either by air or by sea, right past Iceland. That meant if we wanted to keep track of Soviet surface, air, and sub-surface activity in the whole Atlantic region, Iceland was the right place to do it. The U.S. military felt that it probably was the single most important military outpost outside the continental US, except, of course, for Hawaii. It was the base they valued the most outside the United States, because it controlled the whole access to the North Atlantic. The Soviets could come out via the Mediterranean, of course, but it was harder because they had to go past all those countries and get through the Straits of Bosphorus and Gibraltar.

A special problem for them was their very large nuclear fleet. Virtually all the Atlantic Soviet nuclear submarine force was based on the Kola Peninsula. It was from there

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that they could threaten the entire eastern seaboard of the US. When their air flights would go to Cuba, for example, the bombers flying on missions for armament supply or communications, they had to fly right by Iceland because they couldn't overfly Norway or other parts of northern Europe. They had to fly over international waters which meant past Iceland. When they came around the top of the Kola Peninsula, the Norwegians would pick them up on their radar and scramble interceptors to escort them, and then they would pass them off to the U.S. Navy in Keflavik, a base outside of Reykjavik. Keflavik would watch until they, in turn, passed them off to the Brits who would then carry on the monitoring of the flights until they were well along into the Atlantic. U.S. commands would pick them up again when they got closer to Cuba. By then, they were well identified, and we knew exactly who they were and where they were going.

The submarine activity was the most important part, because they were missile boats which would be stationed off the east coast of the United States and a direct threat to our society. They had to pass by Iceland through a rather narrow channel. They were watched by U.S. technical means.

Another aspect of the security situation was that Iceland was also one of our most important points of contact with the Soviets during the Cold War, because of the large Russian fishing fleet that was out there. They were always getting themselves into trouble. The North Atlantic is treacherous water and difficulties for fishing fleets are not uncommon. If you are bent on finding difficulty, that is probably where you will find it.

The U.S. Navy had based an air and sea rescue unit with the "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters at Keflavik. In 20-30 minutes, they could be over almost any spot in the region. They were always rescuing Icelandic fishermen who fell overboard or were injured on a boat. They would go out and pick them up and bring them back to a hospital. We lived in a house in a valley just south of Reykjavik, and just up the hill was the main hospital where the helicopters would take people. At all hours of the day and night, you could hear the chop, chop, chop of the incoming helicopters. Because it was a service that was used

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often, for Icelandic fishermen the base at Keflavik was a very important benefit. Others in the society found the Keflavik Search and Rescue Teams a great comfort as well, since many of them were related to fishermen. They had sons, husbands, whatever, out on the water and in constant danger out there because of freak storms. You couldn't survive very long out there in the cold North Atlantic water. You had to get out quickly. You can't do that by boat, you have to do it by air.

We had incidents where Russian submarines ran into trouble under water and had to surface. At those times, people may have been injured, or there was a fire on the boat, or something happened to cause casualties. The U.S. Navy would go out, pick them up, and bring them to the hospital. Usually, the Russian ambassador would then come over and present his appreciation to our ambassador for the act of assistance. It actually made for quite a happy relationship there between the Russians and the Americans in Iceland.

One of the more curious aspects of the security situation in Iceland was the position of the Chinese Embassy accredited to Reykjavik. The Chinese Embassy in Iceland was one of their largest, and the Chinese ambassador never failed to get any American he could find in a corner and lecture him or her on the importance of NATO. It was a strange phenomenon, to have one of the major communist powers in the world lecturing the head of the democratic bloc that they had to maintain strong defenses in the North Atlantic. But our presence in Keflavik and effectiveness in keeping an eye on possible Soviet adventures in the North Atlantic was important to the Chinese, because it bottled up a major portion of the Soviet forces that might otherwise be positioned against the Chinese.

So Iceland was a very important place in terms of security concerns. On the other hand, Icelanders are very independent. They are an island people, and fishing is a tough and often solitary occupation. In this country if you know New England well, you will understand the breed of independent and tough-minded people. If you are a foreigner in Iceland, you are not considered very desirable, you are an interloper who is often left alone unless there is specific business to be dealt with. Therefore, the presence of about 5,000

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Americans just outside of the capital was irksome to many. One said to me once that, in terms of proportions, it was as if a quarter million Germans or others were to be quartered just outside of Washington DC. How would we Americans feel in such a situation?

So they sometimes were uncomfortable with the American base at Keflavik. There was a strong communist movement in the country. Physically, Iceland is quite large. If you look at it on the map and locate the major population centers, it is very much like Afghanistan in some ways. There is a mountainous range in the middle and around the edge along the coast is where everybody lives, whereas in Afghanistan they would be arrayed along their landlocked borders. Reykjavik had a population of about 860,000 people when we were there; not a very big city, but it contained more than half of the country's population.

Of course, there were small towns and villages scattered along the coast line. These generally isolated communities were a hot bed of communist activity, particularly within the trade union movement. It is a little hard to measure Icelandic political involvement; because the country is so small, it has more of the characteristics of a village or small city than it does of a major power.

However, this small country is a member of NATO and the UN. Its voice is important in world affairs. But the Foreign Ministry is very, very small. All of the government staff could probably fit into a not-so-large auditorium. This intimacy can lead to surprising situations. When we first arrived, for example, we were in town for two or three days when one of my staff came to me and asked if I would mind going over and having a session with the president. I said that it was unusual for a Public Affairs Officer to be invited by the president of the country to have a chat, one on one. "Oh, yes," was the reply, "please bring your wife."

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir was president and probably still is. We replied, of course, we would go whenever she wanted us to appear. We went to her modest office and spent about 45 minutes in her office, chatting about where we had been, what we had done, what

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our plans were in Reykjavik, and about ourselves. She is a very engaging woman who was a French teacher, yet spoke very fluent English, like 99 percent of her countrymen, it seemed. Their intonation is strangely American, which is odd, since they have such a strong influence from the continent. Television, for example, is virtually all BBC.

The president's office shares a house with the prime minister's. You walk into the center corridor of the house, and on one side is the president's office and on the other, the prime minister's. Literally, you could walk along the outside of the building, tap on the window and wave to the president as she worked at her desk. More than likely, she would wave back and return to her duties without another thought. There was absolutely no security. By law, no guns are allowed in Iceland except a few hunting rifles which were very carefully controlled. So there was a very low physical threat, although we did have a bomb threat at my center.

That incident was rather strange and came at a time when we were preparing for the visit of then-Vice President Bush. Although he was stopping only as a courtesy and for a brief rest after an official visit to Moscow, the Icelanders were excited and our small staff were working flat out in support of the incoming mission. One afternoon just after the visit began, we were all working in the third floor offices of the American Center building when someone discovered a suspicious package on the stair landing. No one had been seen coming in or leaving the building, and no one could account for the package. It was innocuous enough, but had a message scribbled on the top of it saying something like "for Israel." Well, that was enough for me; we evacuated the building and called embassy security to deal with our problem.

That was not a welcome notice. Our American Center was across town from where the Vice President was housed, and even the press center at the hotel was several blocks away. The Vice President's security did not want to deal with the situation, since there was evidently no direct threat to the Vice President and his party. Of course, we could not resume work and had to find a way to remove the offending package so that we could get

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back to work. I could not allow the staff, or anyone for that matter, to re-enter the building. We went back to the phones to insist someone take some action. Finally the Icelandic police were called in and embassy security showed up.

Although Iceland has no military, it does have a police force, and there is a special unit in the police that is formed to deal with emergencies. With their jaunty berets and special equipment, that force would, from time to time, practice emergency storming of our building as a part of their emergency training. They were always fun to watch during their drills, but most usually did so with a sense of humor since no one really believed that they would ever be called upon. Yet there we were standing outside of our Center building when the Icelandic version of a Swat Team arrived. All agreed that it probably was a fake, but no one could be sure. That meant that they could not just go in and pick it up, and there were none of the special devices available to go and fetch bombs that you see on TV. The fire department, which had also arrived to our growing scene of excitement, suggested that they take a hose and use it like a water cannon to blow it down the stairs. With visions in my head of the general destruction of our library from a high pressure water stream destroying much of what we had built in a plain but very attractive American library, we tried a bit of negotiation to find a less violent way.

Ultimately, we decided on a fishing technique. With a large fishhook and some strong line, we snagged the package and with the line running down two floors of stairs and out into the parking lot dragged the hooked package outside. Bouncing down the stairs shredded it fairly well without the feared explosion, and it was discovered to contain only animal feces. A bit of a smelly let down after all the excitement, but still a relief and the limp conclusion allowed us to get back to work in support of the visit.

Iceland is a fascinating place with a complicated set of political and national allegiances. If I remember correctly, three times in recent history, the Althing, their parliament, passed a resolution dis-inviting the U.S. from Keflavik. The American Naval Air Station there was noisy, and the local folk did not appreciate it any more when jets took off at 3 in the

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morning. So there were some base-community relations problems. The communists each year staged a march over the approximately 30 kilometers from Keflavik to downtown Reykjavik. They would drive or be bussed out to the base and then march back to Reykjavik with banners flying as a show of solidarity that the base should go. That was an annual, nettlesome problem for us. The communist movement, however, didn't have much else to talk about. That was essentially their issue around which to rally their supporters and demonstrate to others in Iceland their relevance to an issue that most people harbored some degree of frustration.

At the time, the country had very high inflation. It was so bad that they even despatched a team to Israel to see what could be done. Israel had a very successful program in controlling inflation, and it was thought that they might be able to provide answers for the Icelandic problem. To those of us who lived there, the problem was seemingly less complex than it was being made out. Iceland had a socialized system where there was free medical care, free education including university, and so on. The problem was that all those free items were very expensive. I would have debates over this with my staff. For example, I would come in at the start of business and one of my staff people wouldn't be there. I would ask where she was. "She isn't coming in today, she has gone to the hospital." That worried me. "The hospital, that's terrible," I fretted, "what's wrong?" "She has a headache," was the response. That puzzled me. "Why go to the hospital for a headache?" "Why not just take some aspirin and come to work?" With a wave of the hand my concerns were dismissed, "No, she will get something from the hospital."

Sure enough, a couple of hours later she came in. She had been to the hospital, and they gave her aspirin. I asked why she went to the hospital when all it took was a couple of aspirin to solve the not very complicated problem. Her response was, "because it is free." "But," I protested, "it is not free, it costs money." She took time away from the office, she had taken her own and the doctor's time, time consuming paperwork was done, and there always was the "free" aspirin. My point was that somebody, somewhere has to pay for it.

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And pay they did. Taxes were outrageously high, as they are in most socialized countries. It was very difficult to get them to understand that it wasn't free and that they paid for it through their high taxes which they didn't like and went to great lengths to get around. So there was a constant state of tension between the people and the government on paying taxes, but the people liked the idea of free schools, free college, and free medical treatment.

Q: When you arrived there in 1982, I assume you sat down with the ambassador and he, having had problems with his former PAO there, must have been sort of the equivalent of a contract about what you were going to do. Could you talk about that?

YATES: There was no contract. What I was supposed to do was in my marching orders from my agency. I didn't work directly for the State Department, although every official American in the country has to account for the wishes of the ambassador. He is the man in charge, the personal representative of the President. I had to use the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) and the USIA Manual of Operations (MOA) as guides for what I did legally. There were some questions there about what was being done. An example was the USIA international visitors program, which the Ambassador considered his personal program. He would select the people to go, make the announcement, wish them well, and welcome them back. It was his direct connection. He saw it as a good tool through which to build contacts in Icelandic society and, of course, that is the program's purpose.

But in terms of the strict legal aspects of the program, it should have been administered through a committee, not including the ambassador, that was to be formed within the embassy to review the people suggested for the international visitors program. That wasn't operating at all in Iceland. I told the ambassador that it had to be done, but he did not want things done that way. He didn't think it was efficient. He felt that the program would be most effective in the manner he preferred. My first reaction was that, by regulation, he could not manage things that way, but on the basis of the argument that it would be more

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effective in Iceland if he were to continue in that somewhat different approach, I agreed to give it a shot and see how things worked out.

Sure enough, we ran into some trouble very quickly. The trouble came when the ambassador felt the editor-in-chief for Helgaposterin, a communist tabloid, would be a good candidate to go to the United States. I agreed that he would make a good candidate. As the first step, the ambassador asked me to get the editor to come to his office to extend a formal invitation. The catch was the ambassador wished that meeting to be the first news of the invitation. I was asked to bring the editor in without any particular pretext. Since the paper had strong communist leanings, that meant that the editor would be particularly queasy about simply walking into the American ambassador's office. I inquired what the ambassador expected me to give as the reason to the editor and got the response that he did not care, as long as I did not reveal the possibility of a grant.

So I called and asked if he would be willing to come to the embassy and pay a call on the ambassador. He naturally asked, "why?" I finally convinced him to make the call, and he grudgingly agreed to come. I met him at the front door of the embassy and escorted him to the ambassador's office where he sat on the sofa, still wearing a suspicious look. Ambassador Brement greeted him and said, "Well, thank you very much. I want to offer you the opportunity of a lifetime, to go and have a 30-day expenses paid visit to the United States. Isn't that wonderful? When can you leave?" The editor responded immediately, "No." The ambassador was clearly taken aback; this probably had not happened to him before. There was an embarrassed and pregnant silence. The next words out of the ambassador's mouth were "Well, how is your family?" The conversation sort of dragged down from there. After about ten minutes more of embarrassed foot shuffling, I finally took the editor down stairs to put him in a cab. He was fuming. He said, "How can you people do this to me? What do you think I am? Is this a game?" Far from pleased with the prospect, he was explosively angry.

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I attempted to put as good a face on the situation as I could and said, "Look, I will put you into a cab and get you back to your office; then in about a week I will come talk to you." That gave the editor a bit of time to reflect, and when I next got in touch with him, he had cooled to the point of seeing the benefit of such a month-long trip to the U.S.. When the trip was completed, the ambassador's instincts were confirmed. It was a good and constructive grant. For the editor of an important opinion-shaping weekly, it was an important trip. Following his almost uniformly positive travels in the U.S., the editor came to see the country as a more complex and attractive society than he had believed before. He was, therefore, an important and successful international visitor who finally realized what the program was. It was not an exercise in propaganda, but a first-person, direct exposure to the U.S. and its people and culture. The program was highly successful.

However, the painful beginnings had a salutary effect on the ambassador. After putting the editor in the cab, I had gone back up to the ambassador's office and said, "Look, this is the kind of reaction you risk. If I had informed the editor beforehand what was going to happen, none of this would have occurred. If he had been violently against the possibility of travel to the U.S., then we would have shut it off in the beginning, and you would never have had that embarrassing encounter. With the chance to ease the thought to him carefully, explaining the purposes and scope of the international visitor program, I probably could have talked him into seeing the good in the offer. By the time he arrived at the ambassador's office, he would have been able to graciously accept.

Ambassador Bremont realized that was probably the case. So from there on out, we convened a committee as required by the USIA Manual of Operations and selected people from a group nominated by those in the embassy who found candidates that would be suitable. The ambassador still made the official announcement to the selected individual. He would welcome them and give the official laying on of the hands. But we began the practice of telling people in advance that they had been nominated as an international visitor and that the ambassador would like to make the official announcement directly.

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In all subsequent nominations, they proved delighted to come. The process was thereby made whole and in compliance with the spirit and letter of the regulations. Yet that episode was an example of a difficult situation where the Ambassador was not comfortable with the way things were running, and there were some personality conflicts. The nominations he provided were almost always good, for he had close contact with a broad spectrum of Icelandic society. The international visitor committee at post, thereafter, usually approved those the ambassador nominated, but we did have a broader range of candidates to choose from and not infrequently found others who were equally deserving. The process became more solid.

There were other problems at the post. After my arrival, I found that the Fulbright Commission was almost entirely dysfunctional. There were too many egos involved in the management of the program, and the effort suffered as a result. The Fulbright Commission is the one that chooses Fulbright grantees to go to the U.S. for academic study. It is an important use of resources. In order to select the best candidates, you must examine a large number of applications and then have to make hard decisions on who is most qualified. The process is laborious and often tedious. Examining and comparing research fields and work proposals for what sometimes are arcane or radically different subjects makes for quick frustration and not always soundly developed conclusions. The commission was not working in selecting candidates and had to be restructured. The ambassador knew it wasn't working but didn't feel that the post had previously failed to do the appropriate things to make it go. It was a tough situation. It took me about a year to rewrite the bylaws and get some rotation of those serving on the commission. What had happened was a group of fairly senior and well-respected people had been serving on the commission for a very long period of time. This had led to a gradual ossification in thought and policy. Nothing much moved. They regularly failed to come to any sort of consensus on program direction and this led to a slowing of initiatives. Each was stubborn and unwilling to yield on what they saw as matters of either principle or individual conviction.

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The Commission was having financial problems and difficulties holding on to the director and other staff.

I sat down with a young lawyer, a returned Fulbrighter, and, since I also served as chairman of the commission as a consequence of my duties as PAO, I could maneuver things to the point where we were able to rewrite the bylaws, get some of the older members to agree to yield their seats on the commission, and get some of the younger returning Fulbrighters as new members. After very gently massaging the egos of the long-standing members of the board and a gradual push to reform, things began to move. I hired a new director for the Fulbright Commission and things began to perk up a bit. The newly constituted board moved more quickly on nominations and agreement was obtained to keep business moving.

Q: How did the library work there?

YATES: We had a very good advantage in Iceland, because our USIS physical location was separate from the embassy. That was important for a variety of reasons, not least because there were a number of people in the embassy who were unhappy with their situation in Iceland. Ambassador Bremont was a very hard taskmaster, and some in the embassy did not appreciate his way of managing the staff. I quickly learned you never objected to anything in a staff meeting. It was possible to raise differing opinions at a later time, when he was willing to listen and was convincible. Holding a reasonable discussion on a pending decision at a staff meeting was impossible. Ambassador Bremont evidently felt that those meetings were primarily to disseminate his directives, rather than for obtaining the views or thoughts of the staff.

So if you felt strongly enough about things or had a different opinion, it was a tactical error to table it during a meeting. It was better to wait until the meeting was over, hold back a bit, and be the last one out the door. After all others had left the room, one could mention an idea as an afterthought, or shut the door and come back and say, "How about this?"

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Nine times out of ten, he was happy to listen and almost as many times would agree to what might be out of phase with what he had said in the meeting. I found him to be a nice person and very thoughtful - as long as there was not a meeting in progress. There were people who had really strong feelings against him at the embassy and that caused a bad atmosphere. There were occasions when someone would speak up at a meeting and be summarily cut to pieces by the ambassador. That was one of the primary causes of the hard feelings. Personally, Ambassador Brement was a very shy person who evidently saw group discussions as adversarial or at least was uncomfortable enough to feel defensive about anyone who might raise a question or consider an alternative.

Since I was "across the lake," as it were, on the other side of the lake in the middle of town, I had the luxury, if I didn't get what I wanted, of putting my tale between my legs and going home. It was a small embassy, so interpersonal relationships of people working side by side all day long in very small quarters made for frayed personal relationships, and that exacerbated the personal relationships with the ambassador. Perhaps because of my distance and unwillingness to challenge any point made in a meeting, I never had significant difficulties with Ambassador Brement. Rather, I came to respect his solid intellect and special, perhaps audacious, confidence in his own ability to set an objective and follow it through despite the reluctance of his staff. At times, I felt that he had little respect for the experience and capacities of those who worked for him and relied too much on his own. Consequently, many felt that any successes of the mission were assumed by the ambassador as his own, and any failings were seen as lapses by his staff. That, of course, led to hard feelings.

Yet when something spectacular was done, the ambassador usually had a direct hand in it. One example was "Crafts USA," an exhibition of American folk craft artists we staged in Iceland. As I noted, all Icelanders think of themselves as being artists. There was a large art museum called Kjarvalsstadur in Iceland's national museum and the largest available in the country. It is named after Kjarval, Iceland's most famous sculptor, who did an enormous amount of work. We got one half of the museum gratis for a major show.

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The concept came out of the thoughts of Ambassador Brement and his wife, Pamela, who had connections at the Corcoran and other museums in the U.S. that had specialized in American craft art.

USIA had no interest in it whatsoever. It sounded expensive, difficult, unwieldy, and a one-country effort, which meant it wouldn't be worth the money because it could not be spread across several country post budgets. As it ended up, we got no money from USIA. All the money for the support of the show had to be raised among the American community or businesses that had ties with the U.S.. The embassy's economic officer at the time, Al Rimas, and I went around and visited all the people and businesses we could think of, asking for either cash or kind.

For example, we arranged to get shipping of the artifacts from the largest shipping company in Iceland. Getting insurance money was difficult, but we were able to get it out of the largess of the Icelanders and the American community. Iceland Air donated tickets, so we could get people to fly over. We brought over 14 American craft artists to demonstrate their work during the exhibition. It ended up as a major exhibition of craft art, including furniture, textile, glass, ceramics - the full panoply of American crafts. The people at Keflavik from the U.S. Navy contributed an amateur Country & Western band. California wine growers contributed champagne. From all the cooperation and help we received from Icelandic artists, the business community, and the unstinting support from the museum and other professionals in town, we had a black tie opening with square dancing and constant demonstrations by the visiting American craft artists.

The 300 works went on display. A thick catalogue was printed with an introduction by Joan Mondale, wife of the vice president. It was a splashy event, the invitation was the biggest social event in Reykjavik that year. Anybody who was anybody would kill to get one of these invitations. It was black tie and free. The whole town turned out. We got a double page spread in the largest newspaper in town. It was a very major show and had a significant impact on the Icelandic view of American art.

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At the end of the show, of course, we sold off all the art. To ship it back to the U.S. would have been prohibitively expensive. After we covered the cost to the artists and paid off the few expenses that we had, the rest went into a scholarship fund to finance the travel, room, and board for one or two Icelandic craft artists each year to travel to Deer Island, Maine for a summer workshop in craft art. Contributions in local labor made a big difference in keeping the costs down. For example, the display itself was all set up by a local artist and some of his helpers, voluntarily. On his own initiative, he got a construction company to loan glass blocks, the kind you use to build walls, and made circular walls with them inside the exhibit space. That same crew of artists built and painted risers to support the art closer to eye level. The national theater loaned lights to provide illumination for the exhibition. It was quite a show, a true international effort. Such a happening was not a matter of placing a lot of shipped-in art in a large room. It took a lot of dedication and effort of dozens of Americans and Icelanders. The result was a professional show that was, at the time, the largest exhibition of American craft art ever mounted outside of the US. It looked like a show and was something for all to take pride in. At the end of the show, as I said, we sold the works and realized a total surplus after all expenses of about \$35,000. At the time in Icelandic banks, the rate of return was about 10 percent. So we put the money in an account, and the interest was used to pay for those summer sessions for Icelandic craft artists. It was not a lot of money, but about \$3,500 got them air fare on Iceland Air which gave them a discount or free ticket to Deer Island, Maine. Their expenses at the school would be paid. So from the show, there emerged an on-going exchange of craft artists with the U.S..

The bookkeeping process was not easy, because any time anything like profit emerges from direct or indirect activity of the American government, the situation can become tricky. You have to be very careful making sure there are no impropriety, because there are funds involved. We had very strict controls, and it worked out pretty well, so well that when we later had a team of inspectors at Post, they looked at this real hard and couldn't find anything wrong with it. We were very pleased with that.

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Right after I arrived in Iceland, we had gotten our feet wet with another effort at an exhibition. We called it "Scandinavia Today." Scandinavian countries had identified the same problem with us as we had with them. They wanted their image to be put across. They formed a consortium of Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Finland, and Sweden and decided to go to the U.S. and make a presentation of their cultures jointly. The problem was, they didn't know who to pick. There were inter-Scandinavian rivalries among them, so they decided to pick the little guy, Iceland, because it had no royalty and precedence would not be seen as favoring one over the other. The leader of the delegation was the President of Iceland, Vigdis Finnbogadottir.

In Icelandic culture, the practice in naming children is that their "last" name becomes the "first" name of the father followed by "dottir" or "son," depending on the gender of the child. Consequently, President Vigdis, as she was known, was the daughter of Finnbogir. Therefore, since there is no consistent patronymic, in Iceland, the names in the telephone book are by first names. For example, in the Icelandic fashion I would be listed under Ken in the telephone book. If I were an Icelander, my name would be Ken Ernestson, because my father's given name was Ernest. The "last" name does not indicate family lineage and changes from generation to generation. Because there is no other way, lists of people are given by their first names.

As head of the Scandinavian delegation, President Vigdis swept the U.S. and received a very strong reception. She is a very personable lady and accordingly, appeared as a real celebrity. Despite the planning of the other Scandinavian countries to select Iceland so that all would receive relatively equal treatment, she stole the show. The entire event became a romp for Iceland across the U.S.. At least as the Icelanders told it, the other participating nations were a bit miffed that Iceland was able to hold center stage at their expense.

At my USIS center, we scraped together as much of the press reaction as we could from Washington and other sources, built a small exhibition with "foamcore" and "Abstracta" framing, and planned individual shows around Iceland. The exhibit had a reverse twist. We

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were showing Icelanders what Americans were seeing of Iceland and other Scandinavian countries. In doing so, we made a statement about American interest in Iceland and built interest in that nation of things American. The “Abstracta” structure we used is a favorite USIS tool. It consists of a collection of chrome plated rods like an erector set with plug-in connectors. You can make big squares and mount foam core panels in a very flexible arrangement. On the foam core, pictures or other items can be mounted for exhibition. Since it all can be assembled and disassembled quickly, it provides a relatively simple means of constructing a movable exhibit that can be mounted in a variety of venues and then easily shipped among them.

With the “Abstracta,” we had lights that clip on and other items that allowed the set to be constructed almost anywhere and be presentable. We could move into a bare room and mount an incredible exhibition with lights and everything else. There were about 15 panels plus a collection of loose leaf notebooks with plastic sleeves in which we put press notices. Icelanders like to look at things in print, so they were well used.

After we got this whole thing together, we had an opening in Reykjavik, showed it there for a short period, and then took it around the country. This was a good opportunity for me to meet a lot of people and make contacts in places we rarely had the occasion to visit. We had fairly good success. However, the show directly led to a very dangerous situation for my wife and me.

One of the exhibition sites was in Akureyri, which is the so-called northern capital of Iceland. The Arctic Circle almost touches Akureyri and sweeps by only a short distance to the north. My wife and I decided we would drive up to Akureyri for the opening of this show. We decided to do a bit of touring and familiarization on the way, so we drove east along the southern coast to the eastern town of Egilsstader. It was during the spring period in April and the weather was getting warmer. It was a delightful time in Iceland. There is much to see as you drive along the southern coast of Iceland. At one point, there is a small lake and a minor glacier on its northern shore where large chunks of ice break off to float

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in the middle as icebergs. In the same vicinity, there is a stretch of black lava sand. We stayed overnight at Egilsstader and had a chance to meet a few contacts at the school while in town.

The next morning we were preparing to leave for the next leg on the trip, Myvatyn, a notable tourist stop in northern Iceland, but a bit out of the way. It was the prime reason to travel on the eastern route on the way to Akureyri. That morning as we were leaving the hotel, I asked the desk clerk how the weather was expected to be on the road to Akureyri. She asked what I was driving. I said that I had a 4-wheel drive AMC Eagle. She dismissed my possible concern, saying that we certainly would have no problem. So with a stop to top off the gas tank, we were off. After about an hour of driving, it began to snow. This was sort of unusual because it was April and spring was well under way. Despite its name, Iceland is not a cold country. It ranges between 30 and 50 degrees all year long. But it is windy, and it can be unpredictable. The uncertain weather is the result of arctic lows which come off the cold mass of Greenland, another mis-named bit of geography just to the west of Iceland. The Gulfstream waters come up the east coast of the U.S., cross the northern Atlantic and split around Iceland, keeping Iceland not toasty, but warmer than you would otherwise expect. Greenland does not benefit from the warmth of the Gulfstream and therefore remains frigid. The prevailing west winds blowing across Greenland are very cold and dry. But when those winds encounter the warm Gulf waters on the sides of Iceland, a dangerous mix is created. Out of this unstable situation come small but violent storms. These mini-cyclones, intense little storms, often slam right into Reykjavik or somewhere else in Iceland.

On that balmy spring morning, we encountered one of the fiercest. The storm began with a light blowing snow. We had no way of knowing what to expect. At least, this was true for us tourists, unfamiliar with the hazards of the northern coast. As we drove along, another car, an ambulance of all things, passed us traveling toward Egilsstader. That I knew was not common, for very little traffic uses that road and there are few stops between Egilsstader and Myvatyn Lake. There were a few houses along the road, but the scenery

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was mostly bleak lava fields, the kind that brought U.S. astronauts to Iceland to train in terrain that is among the places on earth most similar to the surface of the moon.

Although the light blowing snow continued, I was not particularly concerned since I had seen traffic moving in the other direction. We kept on, although I slowed a bit in the snow. As usual in Iceland, not much accumulates, because the wind keeps anything falling moving along generally horizontally. The snow that does reach the ground is soon lifted again in a swirling mass. If the snow gets heavy enough, the swirling mix becomes very thick and results in a white-out where nothing can be seen. Because much of this white-out is simply blowing snow, it usually does not extend much more than a dozen feet or so directly up and often disappears as quickly as it comes, swept away by the marauding wind.

I wasn't going much more than 35-40 miles per hour, but the road was reasonably clear and there was no evidence of a heavy storm. In this situation, I was still confident that we would soon pass through this aberration. Coming up a slight rise and rounding a corner to the left, I suddenly came upon an eddy of packed snow across the road where the shape of the hill had resulted in a drift. Suddenly I had all four wheels off the road, as I pancaked up on the hard-packed snow. We slid to a stop. Now, I was in real trouble. We were in the middle of nowhere. Nobody knew where we were. What had seemed to be a mild annoyance had suddenly become a real threat. The storm showed no signs of abating, and things clearly were becoming worse very quickly.

My wife and I had no way out. We were ten or fifteen miles away from the closest house and the wind chill factor of the storm made any thought of walking back impossible. Since this was spring, we had no really warm clothing with us and certainly no survival gear. So there we sat, hoping vainly for the storm to end. It did not, and the snow kept deepening around the car, slowly burying us and the engine that just kept running.

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We sat there for a very long time with nothing but our thoughts and fears. The storm continued to build, and it became quite a bit darker as the white-out took over our diminishing world. The temperature was obviously dropping quickly, but the engine kept idling and provided the warmth of the heater. Luckily, when we hit the pack, I was facing almost directly into the wind which meant that the exhaust from the car was being sucked out through an open eddy formed at the back of the car. With the exhaust went the carbon monoxide that certainly would have killed us in almost any other circumstance. As a precaution, I left the window on the driver's side open a crack, but the snow kept blowing in and we were losing heat. Gradually the snow built up around the car. The blowing snow got so intense that at times I had trouble making out the hood ornament in front. It got up to the rails on the roof of the car. We were literally being buried alive. As the snow built up, the engine was obviously straining to keep running. As the minutes turned into hours, I could see that I was gradually losing control of our lifeline to heat. Eventually, even though the engine was running, I could no longer control it, because the linkages were gradually freezing up. We had no blankets, no extra food; we were in deep trouble.

After what we later found out was about four and a half hours of sinking deeper and deeper into what appeared to be a cold tomb, I heard a snuffling sound at the small space at the top of my window. The snow had reached almost to the cracked-open window, but this was different. It was the very welcome black nose of a dog. There was life outside in the darkness. We knew that if there was a dog out there, there had to be someone with it. Sure enough, we soon heard the sound of digging and not long after, the man with a shovel had made a dent in the drift sufficient for us to open the door and climb out. We scrambled through the blowing snow into the cab of his pickup truck, the dog bounded into the rear, and he drove across the dark lava fields back to the small group of farmhouses we had passed so many hours before.

The farmer turned out to be an occasional hand working in the area. He did not speak much English, nor did the kindly people of the farmhouse where he took us. As we were

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chilled completely through, the wife of the house prepared tea, while her daughter who had studied English at school helped us get a call through to Reykjavik, letting people know of our predicament and reporting that we were cold but miraculously safe. Our rescuer had found us through the efforts of the desk clerk back at the hotel we had left earlier that day. The girl at the hotel had heard the radio reporting that a vicious storm had struck along the north coast and had affected the whole area. She had the presence of mind to recall our departing questions about the condition of the road and became alarmed. She called the farm houses along the road sequentially to see if anyone had seen a car pass in the morning. There was so little traffic in that area, a passing car was something to notice. With so few houses, there were not too many calls to make, but when she reached someone who said that no car had passed that morning, she was able to guess approximately where we were stuck. She then called the first farm back to relay the information. The wife there told her she had no car, because her husband had gone to the hospital in Egilsstader with a perforated ulcer that same morning - that explained the misleading presence of the ambulance - but she said that the hired man up the hill probably was there and had an all-wheel drive truck. However he had no phone. Somehow they reached him, and he thought he might know where we were, since there had been trouble on that highway before at the same place. He took his dog and tried to reach us. As it turned out, the storm was so severe that he was forced to detour over the lava fields, off the road, in order to reach us. We had to take that same track across the lava on the way from the buried car to the farmhouse.

We unquestionably owe our lives to him, because we could not have lasted much longer. The engine was pretty much done by the time he reached us. Later, when the storm cleared and the man and I drove back to the AMC Eagle to attempt to dig it out, I found in the four and a half hours we spent marooned in the car, I had burned less than a quarter of a tank of gas. We were very, very lucky. I never had the chance to meet the girl at the hotel again, but we sent her a gold chain necklace as a token of our sincere appreciation. I hope she still has it. The storm taught us never to take Icelandic weather lightly, no

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matter what the apparent circumstances. The episode also demonstrated the care and thought that all in that storm ravaged nation take to insure lives are not lost. We will be everlastingly grateful.

Q: During this time, did you work with people at the naval station? It seems to me if you have 5,000 troops there, it is quite a difficult mass to deal with in a small country.

YATES: Yes, it was, and that is what caused most of the friction. Community-base relations was an important part of the bilateral political relationship. There was a U.S. Navy Base Public Affairs Officer who was charged with trying to strengthen ties, but my office held responsibility to monitor the situation for the embassy. One of the major problems for the base was the annual march the anti-base groups in Iceland would mount as a demonstration of their desire to have the base removed. They would march from Keflavik back to Reykjavik, about 30 kilometers.

At times, the political forces in Iceland would make a bold statement and vote to disinvite the Americans at Keflavik. In each instance, the internationalists would jump into the fray and raise popular sentiment to keep the status quo. It was the effect of public affairs relations that would come to our rescue and protect an important defensive outpost and a multi-billion dollar U.S. taxpayer investment. It was a petition drive, not done by us but by Icelanders who felt strongly that we shouldn't go. We were not only important in the defense of Iceland, which has no army or other defensive means, but we were also important to the people who live in Iceland for rescue and other things.

There is a famous story that illustrates this special relationship. One of the volcanoes off the southern coast of Iceland erupted, I believe in the '60s. At that time, the lava flow threatened a fishing village on an island in the Westmanjar group off the southern coast of Iceland. At that time, the U.S. Navy brought in tug boats and pumped salt water up on the lava, cooling it enough to slow it down and form a natural dam north of the village.

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There was some controversy whether this was the initiative of the U.S. Navy or whether an Icelander actually thought of the idea, but it was effective.

Anyway, the Westmanjar people, who were fishermen and exposed to the dangers of the North Atlantic, felt very strongly that the American Navy was a very positive thing to have around and any time the question of dis-invitation was raised, they lobbied strongly for us to stay. Consequently, when the Althing passed the resolution to ask the American Navy to leave, a petition drive would start around the country, and a lot of people would sign, putting pressure on the Althing to reverse itself.

In this environment, public affairs played a critical part in maintaining the base's presence. It wasn't a Marine base, like we have in Okinawa, it was a technical base, Naval Air. You did not have ships pulling in, with crews coming ashore on liberty. These were pretty settled people, with families resident at Keflavik. They were pilots and technical people. The educational level of the average U.S. military person at the base was much higher than would be expected at other military installations. Keflavik also benefitted from its status as a remote tour, an assignment that all careerists had to accept at one time or another. Yet, although it was technically remote, families could be brought along. At most other remote sites, you had to be apart from your family for a long period. That meant, despite the weather, Keflavik was a relatively attractive posting for career Navy people. This also meant that the relative stability of the base was higher than other locations.

It also meant that entertainment was more contained on the base than it was at other places with a lot of unattached young males who had off-duty time on their hands. For example, it meant that there was no street of bars immediately on the periphery of the base. Many of the personnel went home from work, had dinner with the family, and spent the evening at school functions or watching videos. Iceland was a relatively liberal country, with less rigid mores about co-habitation among those who were not married. While this attitude in other locations would lead to an explosion of U.S. military setting up house with local women, there was not much fraternization in Iceland. The Icelanders preferred it that

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way. The base at Keflavik was very much an island apart from the rest of the society. The capital of Reykjavik was only about 30 miles to the north, but the quirky weather and the stand-offish nature of the Icelanders conspired to keep most of the roving lovers on-base.

Still, there was friction. Unavoidably, there were younger people that had the normally active hormones of youth, and since the Icelandic's view of sex was relaxed and Icelandic women tall, blonde, and blue-eyed, the attractions were still strong. Icelanders were famous for enjoying a drink or two, and alcoholism was a national disease. Reputedly, the largest nightclub in Europe, the Broadway, was located to the southeast of Reykjavik, and partying was constant.

The noise of military jets and the usual activity of a major military installation was the source of other strains. There were fishing villages near the base, and the sudden scrambling of fighter jets in the middle of the night to intercept one or another Soviet appearance from the north got many from their beds. These negatives made base-community relations a bit prickly at times. Of course, there was the usual exercise of base tours and Fourth of July celebrations to which the locals were invited, but the strains persisted.

We had to devise programs that siphoned off as much of the resentment as possible. One of those devices was the NATO tours that we ran from the USIS Post in Reykjavik. Usually reserved for more senior members of the government who were part of the decision making process in the capital, the tours were a staple in our programming. The NATO tours consisted of an occasional program of sending Icelanders to other NATO members in the region to receive briefings on the reasons for NATO and how the base at Keflavik fit into the mix of defenses that protected Europe as well as the US.

We especially liked to send the Icelandic NATO tours to Norway. There, the Norwegians, the linguistic cousins of Icelanders and their closest cultural relatives in Europe, did not do any verbal sparring on the subject of defense and gave the rationale for the U.S.

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naval base at Keflavik in the bluntest terms. In the northern reaches of their country, the Norwegians had a border with the Soviet Union and had nasty memories of the Second World War to encourage them as strong proponents of NATO. There remained Norwegian animosity toward the Soviet Union, and it was not leavened by the even closer geography that Finland had, despite a similarly bad wartime experience. The Finns have a longer, more southern land border with the Soviet Union and face them directly across open water.

So we could always send a NATO tour to the Norwegians, just drop them off, and let the Norwegians take over and give the Icelanders the straight story with much more credibility than we were able to muster. This was especially good, since it showed them that the base was not “American imperialism at work,” as it was characterized by some of the local opponents, but something that others all over Europe had a common interest in.

One of the key elements at Keflavik, and one of the major noise-making offenders at the base were the P3s, the picket aircraft. They would go out and sit on station for a long time, looking for naval or air activity in the defense sector surrounding Iceland, such as Soviet bombers and the surface and subsurface fleets. These aircraft had to fly all hours. Although they were not too noisy, if they found something, they were the trip-wire alarms that would cause fighter aircraft to scramble for an interception.

This sudden blast in the middle of the night would wake everybody up in the villages surrounding the base. Therefore, there was a lot of animosity toward the base, not only because of the presence of the Americans and the beastly noise that stirred their sleep, but also, the main airport for Iceland was co-located on the base. If an Icelander wished to travel to Europe or the US, he or she would have to pass through U.S. base security posts to get to their own airport. For the fiercely independent Icelanders, this was particularly galling. A new airport separate from base security was being built while I was serving there, but this expensive work went slowly and every Icelander who used the airport to travel in and out of the country was pointedly reminded of the American presence.

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Naturally, the Americans also were uncomfortable with admitting the general population onto one of the most sensitive intelligence-gathering bases in the world. The situation was made even more stressful by the fact that members of the Russian, Chinese, and other eastern bloc nations would also have to use the airport/base to move in and out of their assigned country. There were numerous occasions when traveling to the base I could see Russian, East German, and even Cuban transport aircraft lined up on the tarmac only steps away from one of the most sophisticated U.S. military intelligence outposts in the world. For all, it was a most uncomfortable relationship.

It was therefore incumbent on the USIS operation in Iceland to take on the public relations difficulties at the base and come up with innovative ways to take some of the pressure off. Icelanders have a very traditional social structure. For example, the elders of the village had a lot to say about what people think in the town and how they consider outsiders. Their opinions were more important than most. So using this social characteristic as a stepping off point, we organized a special NATO tour for the elders around the base. This would involve the most significant opinion makers in directly experiencing why their discomfort was for an important cause. Although we could do little to relieve the occasional roar of aircraft, we could bring them to understand why that was necessary in the larger scheme of the defense of Iceland and her neighbors.

Unlike the usual NATO tours, we flew them on P-3s, one of the aircraft that were often flying over their heads. To get permission for civilians to fly in military aircraft, we had to go to great lengths to convince the legal minds at the Pentagon that it was necessary for the success of the program. We had to go all the way up the line as far as Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger for approval to carry civilians. We were in a period in which the civilian use of military aircraft was being severely criticized, so we had to get approval from the highest level. Yet it was considered important enough, because we were having serious troubles around the base.

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Selecting a number of the most senior officials from the villages surrounding the base, we put them on the P-3, took off, and let them experience what the P-3 does. They were taken on an unclassified mission, flying low over the water and learning how those planes intercepted surface activity. The detection of sub-surface activity was classified, and they had to settle for tracking Soviet warships on the surface. Then they flew them to England and Scotland and let them talk to people.

It worked magic. It took much of the steam out of the complaints from the communities surrounding the base. These respected elders could go back home and tell their families and neighbors what was happening when those noisy machines took off in the middle of the night. They could re-live for others their first-person experience of what it was like and relate why it was so important to keep track of the military activity that threatened them, as well as the rest of Europe and North America. They were still wakened but now had a more visceral and intellectual understanding of why. That program was very successful in taking a special problem and taking much of the sting out of it, even though the basic cause of the difficulty could not be removed.

I had other duties to manage in regard to the base, but mostly they involved staying in touch with the base information officers and monitoring their programs to insure that they were fully consistent with overall policy and offered no unintended damage to the delicate balance of the larger Icelandic public opinion. The base information program was perhaps more intensely aimed at troop morale than it was at off-base problems, and I had nothing to do with the base newspaper or the other morale and recreation activities conducted there. The only time I was brought into the picture was when their activities moved outside the base and affected Icelanders.

It was not only the problems of the base that bothered the Icelanders. U.S. policy in other parts of the world often intruded into the Icelandic consciousness, many times with negative results. Iceland was upset, at the time, with American policy in Latin America. This was the time of conflict in Nicaragua and Guatemala, and things were not going

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very well for us in Central America. We were getting hit domestically on our policy in that region, and many Icelanders were really upset, particularly Iceland's university students who identified with small nations evidently being pushed around by a superpower. There was a special nest of post-sixties radical students on the University of Iceland campus, and they were hitting us hard on Latin America. We were getting much bad press, and a barrage of critical articles appeared. Even the newspaper that was most often supportive of U.S. policy was giving us a hard time. Of course, the American press itself was highly critical, and the Icelandic press was simply picking up much of their copy from their usual sources. The result was an alarmed and antagonistic people, upset with our policy.

At that time, we also invaded Grenada, and that simply added heat to an already hot issue. One of my most difficult times in Iceland was to go on Icelandic state television for a half-hour interview about Grenada and getting hardball questions thrown at me. What was the purpose of our presence there? What does all this mean? Is this an example of continuing American imperialism? Is this "manifest destiny" in operation? Such questions were of the "have you stopped beating your wife" kind. I am not sure I convinced a lot of Icelanders, but I think the program helped to pour a bit of oil on the roiling waters.

More effective was a program we brought in from the US. A woman, a former nun who had married the Nicaraguan minister of labor after leaving her order, had very strong feelings about what was going on in Nicaragua at the time. She came to Iceland under our auspices, to bring a first person account of the Central American problem to Icelanders. She was not a strong fan of American policy and found much to prompt criticism. Yet she wasn't terribly bitter about it and knew from her own direct experience what was going on there. She understood that the fundamental problem was locally generated and did not have a great deal to do with the Americans. We just got caught in this web.

Her husband had been incarcerated, and she had had a very bad time of it. The first person account and her church training in presenting a story in the most human terms made everyone who heard her come to a new, more complex, understanding of the

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virtually unsolvable problem of Central America. We brought together many of the people from the university, our strongest critics, younger people, and some of the older radicals in town. Most of the people who came to the meeting were communists or inspired leftists. They were a group who were not among our usual crowd at the USIS Center programs and library. Many were highly suspicious of our motives and came to scoff.

Yet the topic had enormous drawing power. They had such deeply held feelings, they had to be present for the discussion. The program had a stunning effect on them. There were people in tears during the meeting. The empathy that the former nun was able to develop with these people was just incredible. She reduced all the coolly distant press coverage down to the most human terms. Her credibility was high and her presentation effective. Almost overnight, the drumbeat of criticism of our Central American policy stopped in Iceland. Icelanders still did not agree with us on the principles and remained suspicious of our big-power motives, but they began to become more sophisticated in their thinking and more aware of the real situation.

A student leader from the university, the one who was the spearhead of this whole effort on campus, was at the program. After the program was over, he walked into my office alone, sat quietly on the couch, and said, "I want to make sure you understand. I am not a supporter of American policy in Latin America, but I didn't realize how much I didn't know. I am going to have to go back and study more." That was a great victory. What it meant was that, for the first time among the left in Iceland, reason and intelligence was being applied to the problem. It essentially knocked the stuffing out of support for radical opinions on the motives for US' Central American policy. It is rather unusual for a USIS programmer to see the direct results of a specific program so starkly. It also was one of the times that confirmed an emotional commitment to the work and offset all the times that "evidence of effectiveness" hadn't seemed to surface. So much is usually taken on faith when a particular grantee returns from a month's international visitor program in the U.S.

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or a visiting lecturer comes and goes, seemingly without a ripple, yet the cumulative effect builds unseen and unsung. This experience, however, was different and most satisfying.

Q: You say there was a communist party in Iceland. Was this a Soviet controlled party?

YATES: The Soviets didn't control it, although I think they would have liked to. I think they were smart enough not to try. My USIS Center was in a separate building in Reykjavik. The only other thing that was in the building with us was a post office downstairs. Once every month, the Russians would mail out their propaganda. They outproduced us by a wide margin. It was clear that our budget for direct mail materials came nowhere close to what they were spending. We could always tell when the Russians were mailing, because downstairs the trash cans would get filled to overflowing. The reason for this was that, since Iceland was very small, a lot of the residents of the west end of Reykjavik had post office boxes in the small unit downstairs. People would stop into get their mail and find their box stuffed with the Russian product. Like junk mail everywhere, it was immediately tossed aside, unread. Much of this offal ended up in the trash bins in the Post Office, so they did not have to carry it home.

The Icelanders must have done marvelously well with their recycle of paper. We were delighted to see all this trash, since it represented a failure of the competition and made our relative dearth of similar materials easier to bear. Nonetheless, the Soviets persisted in their big effort. Part of their lack of success probably came from the fact that Icelanders are very independent. They are feisty people. "Don't tread on me" is something that could be used in Iceland, as well as for our "in your face" forebears. The communism we saw in Iceland was not the communism that we would see in China or the Soviet Union. The Icelandic communists were "social" communists, a wish for a utopian communalism rather than the Moscow tied communism we were combating in Europe.

It was awfully hard to get people to understand this distinction. The awareness of a difference was particularly a product of having to work with those who would probably

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define themselves as “communists” but who would be hard pressed to explain their beliefs in the manner Americans would find convincing. I served in China, Iceland, Afghanistan, and Japan, and all had communist parties, but they were all distinctly different. While there was a worldwide movement (there was no question about that), and a worldwide threat from the Soviets and from the Chinese to some extent, it never caught fire. Even then, it was clear that their economic system was not working in any one of those societies that professed to be the “wave of the future.” Other nations, as they became more sophisticated, began to realize the thing called communism sounded good to some of their people but did not work in practice. It caused severe economic problems.

I think the Icelanders recognized that. During the time I was there, they began to get a handle on the tax problem. They began to make noises about charging people tuition at colleges. They were openly worried about students who would attend school but not study. Why should they? It was “free.” There was nothing there of value for them to learn. So as the realization that the “free” aspects of society the communists offered were not really “free,” as someone in the society would have to pay the taxes to support those “free” activities, public attitudes drifted away from communist dogma.

Still, the communists in Iceland were able to maintain a semblance of influence through the strong ties they maintained with several labor organizations and other public groups. In particular, the labor movement in Iceland was a strong part of the communist movement. For a USIS program in Iceland to be effective, it had to address the very labor groups that were the backbone of the remaining communist effort.

One of the successes of the USIS program in Iceland was the invitation to the head of the carpenter/plumbers union to go on a special program that was run by the AFL/CIO here in the US. The plan was to talk about what the American labor movement is, what its themes, goals and practices were. This was a man who was at the forefront of the anti-base movement, or at least his organization was one of the major funding supporters. Needless to say, he was highly suspicious of the United States. I remember when I invited

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him to come into the office and talk about his visitor grant. He initially said that he did not want to go and would not have gone except that the AFL/CIO was a labor movement and he was a strong unionist. He just could not resist getting together with other labor union types and was curious. Yet he was really suspicious. He returned to my office to pick up his tickets and was very uncomfortable. Although he was a highly intelligent person, he simply picked up the tickets and left without saying much.

About a month and a half later, he returned. He had on a necktie and white shirt, had lost the Leninist cap, and appeared full of cheer. I asked how things went on his trip. Now talkative, he responded, "Very interesting." I pressed for more details. He said, "Well, I didn't realize that the AFL/CIO is a real union." He had thought that the AFL-CIO was just a puppet organization. But he was really surprised when he discovered that it was a genuine, and very feisty organization. That recognition turned his concepts upside down and resulted in a re-evaluation of his own priorities. One month of traveling around the U.S. looking at different union activities expanded his horizons greatly. As I noted, he was very intelligent and had clearly been misinformed.

After this experience in the US, he gave a lot of thought to the direction and emphasis of his own organization. Whether it was a direct result or not, is not really clear, but not long after his visit, his union pulled out of the consortia of unions that were the financial underpinning for the communist movement in Iceland, including the anti-base march. His union was the most affluent of the unions, so when it pulled out, they lost a major portion of their financial backing. Subsequently, the communists lost their office that had been located in the Carpenter/Plumbers Union building and were unable to muster enough financial or popular support to sustain the large anti-base marches that had for so long bedeviled bilateral relations. While it would be an over-simplification to credit all of the change to a simple international visitor experience in the US, it would be equally unrealistic to ignore the obvious effect on the union and its leader.

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Another aspect of the gradual loss of influence of communism in Iceland can be found in the activities of our ambassador. Marshall Bremant was one of the best US experts on Russia. He spoke Russian and was very familiar with the communist movement and its efforts, having served in Moscow. As U.S. ambassador to Iceland, he began a program of social interaction with the communists that was very controversial among those who considered themselves our traditional friends. Conservative Icelanders felt that the ambassador had gone too far in coddling the communists and their leftist sympathizers. That really rankled them. They expected the U.S. ambassador to take his usual role of strong anti-communism and not have anything to do with the group they despised.

Those who considered themselves generally conservative would attend embassy functions and would be elbow-to-elbow with communists. The political divisions in Iceland at the time were so severe that if two opposites were walking down the same side of the street, one or the other would cross the street rather than pass by his or her opponent on the street. I had people come to my office and say, "What is the ambassador doing? These are communists at his party. Doesn't he know that?"

We even had a case where one of the communists I knew came to a reception at the embassy and during the conversation said, "Will you excuse me a moment please?" Clutching the drink he was socially nursing, he walked down the stairs from the ambassador's residence, went out the front door, crossed the street, and joined the crowd where his band of fellow communists with anti-American signs were. He kept the drink in his hand, while participating in the cheering against the US. When the cheering was over, and the small crowd disbanded, he walked back up the stairs and into the reception with his drink still in his hand and full of his usual good cheer. Evidently he did not see any particular contradiction in his conduct.

What prompted his demonstration of a split personality was the efforts of the ambassador to incorporate these antagonists into a reasonable dialog. That relationship gradually expanded, with leftists and those who might be considered "social" communists, slowly

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drawn into what would have been condemned by their peers as a compromising situation not many years before. This effort, coupled with more formal programs such as the NATO tours, the international visitor program, and the constant visits of speakers in USIS programs, all added to the gradual weakening of the intellectual commitment of many to leftist opposition to U.S. policy. It contributed greatly to their gradual diminution as a serious force, either against the base at Keflavik or against America as a nation.

The ambassador did a marvelous job of accelerating that process, but I do not think he ever got full credit for that from State or from the conservatives in Iceland who constantly grumbled over his unusual practices. Because of his controversial personnel policies that affected all within the embassy community, he later suffered a loss of confidence that never was repaired. While he almost singlehandedly disemboweled the communist movement in Iceland, he was not to enjoy the fruits of his victory with the accolades of the bureaucracy. Instead, he came to be roundly criticized and eventually hounded out of the service.

The conservative Icelanders harbored very strong opinions about dealing in a civil manner with leftists or communists. In USIS, we sponsored periodic delegations of Icelanders on the NATO tours I already discussed in relation to the problems of the base. There was a particular correspondent on Icelandic state television who the conservatives in Reykjavik thought was a closet communist or at least a strong leftist. They didn't like him and resented his growing prominence on Icelandic state television. One of these tours came up, and I selected him to join it. He was smart, affable, young and probably had a good future ahead of him in the Icelandic electronic media. So I picked him and he readily accepted.

I got a stiff call from some conservative Icelanders, saying I couldn't do this and they would not cooperate with us if he were to go on the trip. They argued that he would not be suitable for a NATO briefing and tour. In fact, the Icelandic ambassador to NATO in

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Brussels said he would not have this man in his room, never mind allow him to visit NATO headquarters as a guest.

This was quite a dilemma. The NATO tours were specifically aimed at demonstrating the value of NATO in protecting the security of Western Europe and the US. They were very effective, as I knew. But could we afford to antagonize our Icelandic allies in a confrontation over principles, even if we were convinced that we were right? There was nothing to be done except follow through with the trip, but the Icelandic ambassador at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels had refused to consider the possibility. After wrangling a bit, we decided to go forward with the trip, but skip the NATO Headquarters in Brussels. This time we would send the group to Berlin and see first hand what the confrontation was all about.

That change in plans neatly sidestepped the Icelandic ambassador's ability to interfere with the trip, since it was fully U.S. funded and we needed no blessing from Icelandic diplomats on what we could or could not do. We meant no confrontation but felt simply that the value of the NATO tours was that people like this television personality could experience a different point of view. We had to proceed without allowing anyone else's political agenda from restricting our judgement of what was best and in the U.S. interest.

So the trip went generally as planned, save for the visit to NATO headquarters. Some felt that was not much loss, since the briefing in Brussels was seen as very dry and uninspired. Some advice we received was that skipping Brussels was not much of a loss. The group went on to West Berlin instead. They visited the Wall, which was still in existence. The Wall was always a sobering experience. There was almost religious in actually confronting the police state across the small no-man's-land that divided the two halves of what had been the German capital. Something also happened to our special grantee upon witnessing the reality of the Wall. The watchtowers, the concertina wire, the Wall itself covered with the graffiti of hundreds of Germans who hated its reality and its symbolism.

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He returned from the NATO travels a changed person. In no way could he be considered converted from his vague socialist or leftist beliefs, but he now more resembled a liberal American Democrat than a Russian communist. He had a sort of epiphany at the Wall. He just could not conceive of what he saw. The grimness of the Wall was beyond his wildest imagination. It communicated to him the communist style of oppression that so many people around the world had known and lived with for so many years. He had never viscerally felt that before. Iceland is an island, a nation apart. For a short period, the Danes had occupied Iceland, but there was never oppression of the Soviet brand. Icelanders prefer to ignore their colonial status as an aberration of history, something to be forgotten as a bad dream that has no relevance to life as it is lived. The visit to the Wall brought up short any illusions of the benefit of the Soviet system.

To some degree, the visit pulled away some of the dust of illusion from around his eyes. I can't say he turned into a new conservative, uncritical of U.S. policy and accepting all that we offered, but he certainly became a very important contact for me at Icelandic state television. In fact, he was my interviewer at the time of my Grenada interview, which was from my point of view a very positive thing, because it allowed me about half an hour of Icelandic state television air-time to explain the U.S. point of view to everyone in Iceland. No amount of other effort could duplicate that opportunity. I never again had any contact with the Icelandic ambassador to Brussels, but we resumed our NATO tours, including the normal stop at the Brussels headquarters. Perhaps the briefings continued to be dull, but it was important to have people see the headquarters and get a sense of the cooperation which was at the root of the NATO organization. I wished that all could visit the Wall in Berlin, but it was slightly off the main topic of the tours, and I had to satisfy myself that, at least in one instance, it did make a difference.

Q: When you left in 1985, the Cold War was still going. How did you see Icelandic-American relations at that time?

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YATES: I think we had pretty strong relations at that time. Of course, it was not too much longer thereafter that the summit was held in Reykjavik, mainly because it was a secure place to go. There were few guns in the country, save for a small number of strongly controlled hunting rifles, and there were very strict controls on who came and went. There was virtually no possibility of a terrorist attempt there. Yet we had the incident I previously described of the package that was left in our offices on the occasion of the visit of Vice President Bush.

That same visit of the vice president also illustrated how relaxed the Secret Service could become when in as safe an environment as Iceland. One of the usual duties of a public affairs officer is handling local press on American issues as well as the American press when it visits. We rarely got any attention from the U.S. press except when a VIP (very important person) visit occurred or an occasional correspondent dropped in to interview the ambassador.

Since the vice president was there essentially on a rest stop following a tiring Moscow funeral, there were no plans to make any press statements or expand the purpose of the visit. Of course, he would pay a courtesy call on the prime minister and stay in the guest house. There was no time for him to stand up and take questions from the press.

This presented a complex problem. The Iceland press was beside themselves with a desire for some sort of contact with the vice president. In the presence of Vice President Bush, they had the highest American ever to visit Iceland, and they were not going to be able to get any pictures, not to mention interviews. There was no time in the schedule at all for contact with the press. He was going to go salmon fishing, see the president and prime minister, and pay a call at the foreign ministry. The U.S. Secret Service, in particular, was adamant about there be no access. I finally cornered one of them and said, "Look, I am besieged by justifiable requests from the Icelandic press. It is important to them and U.S.

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government that we have at least something the Icelandic television can film for showing tonight because this is a big event for them.”

They were firm, “No, you can't do it.” I had to come up with some sort of reason for at least limited contact, and suggested, “Look, what would happen if you were ambushed?” “What do you mean, ambushed,” they challenged. I elaborated, “Maybe on the sidewalk after the call at the president's office.” “He has to walk from the president's office to the car, right?” “If we happen to have a crew on the sidewalk at that time, would they be pushed away?” I worked other arguments to bolster my logic. “Everybody agrees there is no security risk here; what if you guys looked the other way?” Well, the whole party was tired, as it had been a long and tense security situation in Moscow. And perhaps so tired that they had enough of the persistent public affairs officer. Finally, they relented, “Okay, but not for long.”

With that bit of opportunity and a word of caution, I set up my friends from Icelandic state television on the sidewalk outside the president's office. As soon as the prime minister and the vice president came out of the building, the Secret Service looked the other way and the Icelandic press “ambushed” them on the sidewalk. From that brief encounter, there resulted a show of about half an hour that night featuring a joint sidewalk interview with Vice President Bush and the prime minister. In terms of content, they obviously were very much in agreement on most issues and the evident cordial harmony was a clear feature of the show. While the Icelandic public got a very positive view of the state of bilateral relations between the U.S. and Iceland, I got a few points in my working relations with the press at Icelandic state television. The most instructive part of the exercise was the fact that the Secret Service was flexible enough to understand the need and look the other way. It was really a nice event. That was one of the most constructive and enjoyable projects I had the chance to work on while in Iceland.

Q: In 1985 where did you go?

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YATES: I came back to Washington.

Q: With USIA?

YATES: Yes.

Q: How long were you there?

YATES: In Washington, from 1985-89.

Q: What were you doing?

YATES: Two things. The first year I spent in the Office of Management. I wrote a study of USIA's efforts abroad to keep track of our audiences, understand who they are, where they are, and how well we are in touch with them. For the other three years, I went across the street to the Voice of America where I was a Special Assistant to the Deputy Associate Director for Modernization. He was in charge of all the relay site improvements around the world. It was a major program. There was \$2.8 billion dollars worth of work to be done around the world to upgrade our Voice of America facilities. We were still using vacuum tubes in our transmitters in many places around the world, including some of the major sites in the U.S., and that meant that our facilities were antiquated. My participation in the modernization program lasted from 1986-89. Then I went into language training for Chinese, continuing on to Beijing at the end of 1989.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point. I think it is a good point to stop. One question before we leave here. When you were back in the United States, from 1985-89, was Charles Wick the director?

YATES: Yes.

Q: How was he perceived at this point by USIA?

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YATES: Charles Wick was director for some time. He was director when I was in Japan. He was a controversial, mercurial type director. There were people in USIA that didn't have much regard for him, and there were other people who had a lot of respect for him. He had a vision of what he wanted to do. Many of the directors that I had witnessed before, did not. That, in my estimation, was something very valuable. You might not have agreed with what he did and you might not have agreed with the way he did it, but at least he had a vision and that meant something. Other directors simply managed the agency, keeping the lights on and the money flowing. That was fine as far as it went, but Charles Z. Wick added an extra ingredient of flair.

Charlie Wick, or "Charlie" as he was referred to by most in the field, had direct connections with the White House. He was a friend of the president. Mary Jane, his wife, was a friend of Nancy. The original Wick/Reagan connection developed in California, through a PTA, it was rumored, where Mary Jane and Nancy were members. The Wicks even would go to the White House during holidays when there were family gatherings.

Consequently, it was a golden period for USIA, because it meant we had White House support. The president would show up for White House type of things at USIA. He even came to Voice of America and did VOA shows. He enjoyed Charlie, I guess. Charlie was a musician and used to be the arranger for the Dorsey band. His wealth came from a whole line of rest homes and health care facilities. The great joke in USIA was that he was the man who underwrote "Snow White and Godzilla" or something like that. It wasn't even a grade B movie. It wasn't very well received. But he was part of the media milieu in California.

Yet perhaps because of his showbiz background, he had an idea of what he wanted for USIA and could be very persuasive, even dictatorial, about his passions. His biggest idea was Worldnet, which he pursued with vigor and single-mindedness. Worldnet was USIA's international network of television service that consisted of studios in Washington and a TVRO (Television Receive Only) antenna at Posts around the world. The accepted

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standard of the time was “C-Band,” which meant that we had to use big, 13 meter dishes, capable of receiving C-band signals from satellites circling the globe. Because of the usually very restrictive laws of nations around the world (including our own) which prohibit foreign ownership of broadcast facilities, we could receive only, not broadcast.

The usual program took a lot of arranging and patience to make all the pieces work together. All was controlled from “Master Control” back in Washington. Close to the time of the program, we would establish a telephone connection with Master Control over two lines. The first was the open line used by the participants in the program in conference-call style. The second was a “coord” line that allowed the programmers at the post and those operating the program from the Washington end to communicate. The subject of the program would then be placed in a studio in Washington, on camera with an earpiece through which he or she would receive instructions from Master Control and be able to hear questions from the field. Typically, because of the expense of the medium, several posts would band together in a single program. All would be tied together telephonically, but there would be only one television image broadcast to all via satellite. The program participant in Washington could not see those on the other end, but it did mean that we could “daisy-chain” audiences at a number of posts together in a single program. It was an “international town meeting.” Similar groups would be convened in a sequence of countries and, in turn, ask questions of a resource person. In any one country, the participants could not only hear the comments of the person in Washington, but also benefit from a better understanding of the concerns of neighboring participating countries.

At the receiving post, the audience would be arranged in a room with one or several television receivers through which to watch the person or panel in Washington. About 15 or so would be able to ask questions in the usual hour program, assuming that three or four other posts would also be participating. We could accommodate up to around 50 before the size of the crowd became too big to be handled comfortably with TV monitors. We would often do a round robin connection where there were one or two people in Washington talking to people in Japan, Korea, Singapore, etc., all at the same time. They

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could all hear each other, but they couldn't see each other. All they could see were the people in Washington.

It was very intimate and effective. You could quibble with the statistics that Charlie used in front of Congress, like citing billions of people contacted, but nonetheless the effect was immediate and strong. It quickly became a very important new programming tool that was soon a central medium for program contact. I mentioned earlier in my discussion that we used videotape to some effect. This was the same kind of effect as with videotape but amplified to a different level, because it involved direct contact.

Q: Tell us something about your work at VOA.

YATES: The Voice of America had a modernization program to upgrade its aging facilities. I was a special assistant which meant I was the right hand man for the person who was heading up the program, Mort Smith. I had known Mort many years before when he was the Deputy Public Affairs Officer in Seoul and I came in as a JOT. Our connections went deeper, for my first post in Kwangju was once his post. He was Area Director for East Asia when I was in Japan. He then had taken over the modernization program of the Voice of America and asked me to join him. The program was involved in making treaties with the various countries abroad where we could build new relay stations and then stations which would eventually be turned over to the broadcasting side of the house to operate. At the time, we were working on a relay station in Israel. It was in the treaty stage. There was one in Morocco which was under construction. One in Sri Lanka, which was in the final stage of planning and construction. And one in Thailand which was also gradually coming together. We were looking at some of the islands in the Pacific as a possible location for future facilities. Tinian was among the most important of them. While I was at the Voice, my job was to coordinate these things, pull them together, and give assistance to Mort in any way I could.

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For example, we had about 200 engineers at the Voice of America doing the technical work necessary to support modernization, to design and build the relay stations, and keep the plant running. Before you built a station, you had to have some idea how it could propagate the signal. Shortwave radio doesn't operate like medium wave, it skips between the ionosphere and the surface of the earth. In some places, it comes in loud and clear, but in others, it may not be heard at all. Under certain conditions, the signal can bounce between the ionosphere strongly enough to allow it to be heard from a long distance. You probably can't hear it within 50 miles, but you can hear it 500 miles away and multiples of miles further, depending on the strength of the signal.

The problem is, where does this thing skip to, because the ionosphere rises and falls based on the time of day, the temperature, humidity in the lower levels, and happenings totally out of control on earth such as when there are solar flares. A lot of magnetic and technical changes can affect the height and the transparency of the ionosphere. Radio waves are energy. You broadcast the waves out and hope they bounce at the right spot to hit where you want people to hear you. There is no point in transmitting from the Philippines, where we were also trying to modernize, in the Chinese language and have it land in Korea or in Russia, but not in China. So the idea is to pick the right frequency, inclination of the antenna, and the distance from the broadcast point so that the skip comes down where you want it to and your energy is focused on that area where they speak the language of your broadcast.

That is a pretty complicated set of dynamic variables. You need a big computer to do enough calculations to maximize the possibility that you will broadcast as efficient a signal as possible. The problem was that the Voice of America years before had bought a large VAX computer built by Digital Equipment Corp. It was a main frame computer with enough power to meet the need, but it was never installed. Instead, it had been placed in storage. The reason was security. The security gurus said we could not use it, because in order to meet the needs of security, VOA would have to build a special room with lead lined walls

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to keep emanations to an acceptable level. The system would be processing classified information up to the level of secret, so that brought everything to a halt three years before. Since there was no funding to do the expensive work of building a special room complete with lead lined walls, a raised floor, ramps up to the raised floor (in compliance with OSHA handicapped rules), special air conditioning, heavier electrical wiring, and a multitude of other requirements for a mainframe computer, the project was stymied. The Voice had spent about \$500,000 for a computer that it could not use.

Mort Smith asked me to figure this out and get it installed somehow. Security was adamant; it could not be done without the prohibitively expensive building modifications. The key to the problem obviously was security. Searching about for another opinion on the security question, I got in touch with a new operation that had just been activated by the National Security Agency. Because of the large number of civilian agencies with computer security problems, NSA had put together a special staff to consider the problems from the point of view of security. Their responsibility was government wide. The person in charge said he would be willing to bring his people over and take a look and see what he could do with it.

We wanted to put the computer on the third floor of what is now the Cohen Building. That location was close enough to the engineers and the propagation people to be useful. Security's original concern was that if the computer was too close to a public area, even the street outside, an uncontrolled person or organization might be able to infiltrate our security by installing sensors close enough to intercept emanations from a running computer. Some felt that equipment was available that might even be parked in a van outside the building to keep a watch on the classified material we were processing.

Yet our third floor location was in the middle of an old, heavily constructed building several floors above ground level. The concept that a large enough installation of equipment sensitive enough to monitor our equipment could be placed either in other offices of a controlled government area or on a street two floors below and at least 75 feet from the

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internal room seemed a bit far-fetched. The National Security Agency team came to the reasonable conclusion that it was quite beyond possibility that the Russians, the Chinese, or some other group interested in such arcane information would park a large semi just outside our building to try to listen in on the hours long propagation programs running on the new mainframe.

So as we started to strip the problems away, they couldn't find anything as long as we didn't go to a top secret level of information. No one could conceive of such a possibility, so there was no particular reason why we needed a lead-lined room. I asked for and received a letter from the NSA team for the USIA Office of Security; it confirmed their finding that there was no problem. That was enough to allow the project to get back on track. We simply gutted the room, put some paint on the walls and cleaned up the general mess to ready the room for the new installation.

After three years in storage, however, the VAX was so old that DEC asked if we would accept an equivalent replacement, one that the company was still making replacement parts for and could ensure that its operation would be reliable in terms of the warranty. The upshot was that the Voice of America got a brand new main frame computer at no additional cost and was able to install it in a simple, flat floored office environment. Finally, we were able to do our projections and plots and even classified work on the needed computer. It took us about three months to get it in. As far as I know, it is still running.

Another of my responsibilities was to handle relations with Congress through congressional staffers. Since the modernization program involved several billions of dollars in very long-term construction projects, the annual budget review in Congress always targeted the VOA program as something to chip away at. The very young people who were tasked with taking a look at the program for Congress did not have much experience on large scale projects such as the modernization program, yet they had the power to screw things up in federal programs. Even then in the mid-'80s, we had very strong restrictions on funding. They would say, "What do you need this money for?" "You

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have not even spent the money in last year's budget.” “Why should we give you more?” Similar questions were leveled at us from OMB (Office of Management and Budget) whose staffers were often young people with fresh degrees in economics but little field experience.

Of course, the reason was that such long term construction projects required the commitment of large blocks of funding in advance, to be paid out as the work proceeded. These were often ten-year contracts with substantial funding committed in one year and not “obligated” until the year the work was completed. You had to commit money to a contractor to start work. You could not “obligate” (i.e., commit) it until you were satisfied with the sufficiency of the work, but no contractor would begin work if there was any doubt that the money was available. The Congressional and OMB folk said that we had 200 million dollars we hadn't used yet, so we should only come back when that was fully used to request more.

It was very difficult for them to understand anything beyond the near term of next year's funding. So we had to agree that we had earmarked funds for two or three years of several hundred million dollars that was sitting there and hadn't been spent yet, but that money was “committed.” Trying to convince these young people of that logic was an interesting and sometimes very frustrating experience. We really needed a steady flow of adequate funding to maintain progress and keep ultimate costs as low as possible. For example, if we are going to build in Sri Lanka, we need to have the money up front to be able to build this station right now, although we are not going to spend the money for three years. It was very hard for them to understand why we had to have additional money.

One of the more enjoyable duties I had during my tenure at the Voice was to accompany Dick Carlson, the then Director of the Voice of America and the person who was in charge of VOA News, to Europe to take a look at the facilities of Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL) and to see what they had and how we might be able to more fully utilize them. I went along as the modernization person and as a bag carrier as well. It was a lot of

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fun. The trip took our small group to Munich, Bonn, Cologne, and other places, examining equipment and office facilities as well as paying a call on Deutsche Welle, the German radio corresponding to the Voice of America. So the job was not all hard work and sweat at the Voice.

Q: Okay. We will pick this up next time in 1989 when you were taking Chinese.

YATES: All right.

Q: Today is May 14, 1997. Ken, you have some thoughts about working in Washington versus working in the field and also working with Congress.

YATES: I think the experience at the Voice of America put me in a unique position, because I brought with me a fair amount of field experience. I came back to Washington, first spending a year in the management side of things doing a study of our audience records system. But the Voice of America gave me a different kind of exposure. There, I was working with people who were principally Washington budget people, contract people, engineers, and congressional staffers. What I found in that experience was in some ways disconcerting, because not all the people fully understood the purposes for which they were working. They were working very hard, but many of the staffers had never been overseas and did not completely appreciate the end results. They did not have a sense of what was going on in the field, the “why” of what we were doing.

Budget people, people handling congressional relations, and the people who were interpreting USIA Washington to the funding organization, Congress of course, really did not have a very firm grasp of the principle objectives in the field. Some of these people had worked for USIA for a long time. Many others, however, were political appointees who came in from being campaign workers or had experience in business or some other part of government. Those who were the “talent” in the broadcast studios often came from the societies to which they were broadcasting, but even they had only part of the full picture.

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The consequence was that Congress, OMB, and other elements of the U.S. government that were intimately involved in our budget process really didn't have a clear picture of why the money was being spent. Worse, they felt they did have the needed understanding, and could become quickly resentful if confronted by a Foreign Service Officer who had just come in from the field. That resentment was deeper since Foreign Service people serving in Washington simply were putting in time at the "home office" while looking for another assignment abroad. If the FSOs assigned to the Voice were in responsible positions with supervisory duties, resentment was deeper since they were seen as interlopers who were taking positions that should be available to domestic employees who sought advancement.

As a result of this resentment, FSOs generally avoided an assignment at the Voice, since the hostility you had to survive overwhelmed the possibility of deriving a real sense of satisfaction from taking a very responsible position. Some thrived on the challenge, but more often than not, FSOs avoided assignments at the Voice. I did not suffer as much as some, since I was working in a position not in the usual ladder of promotion for domestic employees (although I was replaced by one), and many of the people I worked with were engineers not threatened by one so far removed from their own pecking order.

At the Voice, with the exception of a smattering of overseas correspondents and technical people at a number of the relay stations abroad, the policy people, the broadcast talent, and the people doing the writing and program creation were principally domestic employees. And many of them, particularly on the broadcast side, were foreigners who came in under a variety of contracts, stayed, and later became American citizens and broadcasters at the Voice of America. Again, some of these were very fine people, very smart, competitive and had a true mission as they saw it. The missions did not always coincide with the definitions that were laid out by the posts in their individual country plans.

Often the disagreements between the field and the Voice became strained, but since the Voice was administratively apart from the areas and other administrative portions of USIA, they could figuratively thumb their noses at USIA and do essentially what they wanted.

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USIA lacked the capacity to listen to all of the broadcasts, much less to translate all those in foreign languages or read the texts.

The VOA charter realistically demands that the news section of the Voice operate without influence from the policy concerns of the rest of the government. This is as it should be. There were “VOA editorials” which were identified expressions of U.S. policy that were cleared both through USIA and State, yet, as we all knew in the field, there was much latitude for inserting troublesome copy that gave posts fits of frustration.

In the field, you had defined goals and worked hard to achieve them. At one time or another, the Voice would carry items or features that would confound our program efforts and confuse our audiences. To citizens in another country, often where controlled media were the rule, inconsistency in the point of view between the USIS post and VOA did not signify a vibrant democracy but rather a confusion of goals in a government that could not keep all of its parts in sync.

The consequences of this confusion have been worsened by USIA's merger with the Department of State and the Voice being made totally independent under the supervision of the Broadcasting Board Governors (BBG) in 1998. In my way of thinking, any move to make the Voice more distinct from official channels is a disservice both to those who work there and to the taxpayer who should expect an efficient and purposeful American voice abroad.

I suspect that the people who were involved in the changes and the people who were making budgetary decisions were not very well versed on what we are doing abroad. Not that it was secret, but it was difficult to find anyone who could put subject and verb together on the topic of U.S. information abroad. We were supposedly communicators, but we could not communicate at home. Part of that is Congress, because like other federal agencies, USIA cannot not use taxpayer funds to “lobby” Congress as we were enjoined against doing that. Again the law has a good purpose; to ensure that a government in

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power could not propagandize the citizenry using their own tax dollars. Yet this meant that the people who were paying the bills could not really understand what their taxes were being used for. It was a clearly understood rule that we were not to broadcast to audiences in the US.

Superficially, it sounds fairly simple. You put up an antenna, hook it to a transmitter and a microphone, and you are on your way. But in fact, you are not. Even with years of experience abroad and a fairly good knowledge of the receiving end of VOA broadcasts and their impact, I was surprised at the complexity of the operation. There were two hundred engineers on the staff, and they all worked hard, because moving a reliable signal from broadcast booth in the U.S. to a listener, often in a denied area abroad, was a very difficult problem. Mistakes in propagation cost the American taxpayer a lot of money. You have to burn fuel to put a signal in the air. If the signal doesn't land where you want it to, the money you spent on fuel is entertaining turtles, a common metaphor of the time.

There were charges, for example, that in Central America where local topography and the politics behind the choice of a location meant our relay station in Costa Rica essentially broadcast into a lake. Other parts of the country could hear the signal, but large amounts of energy was spent pumping a signal into the water. They were the most well-informed turtles in the world. The only way we could tell how well our signal was getting through was from responses back from the field. Our monitoring of programs were not very good, because we lacked sufficient funding to hire people to listen and submit accurate reports. Often we had to rely on roving monitors who would move around the world, sampling the signal in varied locations and conditions. At other times, we were able to convince a bored housewife from the embassy community or a patriotic Fulbright scholar to take on some of those duties. Volunteer work can save a lot of money, but results can be uneven. Bureaucratically, however, economies had to be made somewhere, and monitor payrolls most often came up short.

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An example of our reach was in Guangzhou in China. China was then and still is, I am sure, one of the more important customers for the Voice of America. We have a Cantonese service which absorbs a lot of time, money, and energy. The heart of the Cantonese speaking region is Guangzhou, the old Canton. But there was a great controversy over whether or not the people in Guangzhou could actually hear the Cantonese Service. Some people said, "Yes, no problem." Other people said, "No." There was not a large volume of mail from the area.

Q: During this period did we have a consulate general in Guangzhou?

YATES: Yes, we did. The Branch Public Affairs Officer there was among the people who were telling us they were not hearing the Voice of America. We would send an engineer out from Hong Kong with a radio, and he would sit in a hotel room or ride and bus and try to listen. The reports that he would bring back were not terribly encouraging, they were confused. Travelers from the embassy and other visitors with other business would volunteer to report on the reception of the Voice while in town. Often, they would say that the English service and the Mandarin Chinese service could be heard, but Cantonese was nowhere to be found. Still, that reporting was admittedly not reliable. The problem was getting Cantonese-speaking volunteer monitors to make the effort.

Reception is not easy when you are abroad with an international radio. It is not the same as turning on the old reliable FM or AM station in your home town. Shortwave radio is subject to variations in clarity, signal strength, natural and man-made obstacles, and interference from both intentional and random sources. You have to tune it in carefully and keep adjusting the tuning as the signal fades or interference blocks out a clear signal. At times, you can hold a weak station for a while, only to lose it as atmospheric or local conditions change. It is difficult to listen to.

Sometimes you can find the desired signal, but it is not comfortable listening. The loss of a signal may have involved antenna orientation, time of day, the frequency that it was

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broadcast on, or the position of the sun. The only broadcast facility that we had close enough to expect a reliable signal into the Guangzhou region was in the Philippines, a long way from the Chinese coast. The Philippines carried the burden of broadcasting to East Asia and China in particular. We had a transmitter site in Thailand, but mainly medium wave. Beyond that, there was nothing much else. There was Sri Lanka, but that was even more remote. The skip on each hop is 500 miles and every time you get further away, the wave loses energy. As distances increase, the reliability of the signal diminishes proportionally. Some sites in the world are remarkable, and a signal from there gets almost anywhere. Unfortunately, most VOA sites are the result of political and economic compromises, and the engineers have to try to do their best in very difficult conditions.

Earlier I talked about the installation of a computer. That computer used a program that was created by another agency in the government to approximate propagation around the world based on the magnetic field, the conditions of the ionosphere, the time of day, the position of the sun, etc. You dump all of these variables into a computer, and it is supposed to tell you how strong a signal is in a given area at a given time. There are more variables, the type of antenna, the amount of power you are putting behind the antenna, etc. and these things cost an awful lot of money.

There is only one place in the world where it is thought that conditions are almost ideal, and that is in Ecuador. There is a particular mountain in Ecuador from which you could reach almost any point in the world with a shortwave radio. That is why a lot of Christian broadcasters have located there. But for us at the Voice of America, locating a relay station was a political question. What government in its right mind, even our close and strong allies, would allow a foreign government to come in and broadcast from its soil. Very few. And only in those places where we had special situations, like the Philippines, could we get permission. Even then, our flexibility is very closely circumscribed. We could only broadcast in languages that were not native to the country. We had to promise we were not broadcasting to the natives of that country. And of course, we had to pay a lot of

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money up front for facilities on the ground and training engineers and staff and hiring the local people. So it gets very complicated.

Another example of that problem is the experience of Radio Free Asia. Where do you put it in Asia? You can't get there from California, although we had one of our stations in Dixon, California broadcasting to Asia and to Latin America. Latin America is a better shot, but they tried to get to Asia and it was not very successful. They had the same problem. You put a lot of energy behind a signal, and it bounces and loses some more to the turtles. Every time you bring it back up again, varying conditions in the ionosphere mean a longer or shorter hop, so the computer would plot the hops and try to tell you with a fair amount of accuracy whether or not you are going to hit what you want. Another problem was a signal that was excellent one day would be terrible when a sun spot storm appeared. It is an engineering nightmare.

Try to explain that to someone in Congress. It is hard enough to do that here when I have the time and a patient listener. Imagine what it was for a harried, frenzied, busy, "I want it on one page" kind of staffer from the Hill. Therein was the rub. My boss, Mort Smith, was working very hard at trying to negotiate some of these deals like Morocco. The king of Morocco was a great help to the Voice of America, and we were building a relay station there. It turned out we were building it in a watershed area which tended to flood every year. So what they were doing was building up a station on what were small islands above the usual flood crest. For most of the year, they were in a dry sea, but this was the only land that was politically expedient. I was told that the Morocco station construction was the largest earthmoving project in the history of man. This was long before the Chinese began the large Yangtze dam, which may replace the Morocco station for "biggest" honors.

At great expense, we put antennas, facilities, and power equipment on tall dunes, which we were building to try to stabilize them. VOA was able to get permission from the king for the site, but the construction costs amid a flood plain made the cost of the station much larger than most. Those were the kind of real problems that faced the Voice of America's

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engineers. If you found a country agreeable to a relay station, it was not always the best place in the world from which to broadcast. The best countries were not always accessible to us.

We had great trouble in Israel, for example, putting in a relay station to broadcast to the Arab world. This was a place where you would think it would be fine, politically. The difficulties were military and environmental. The place in Israel that we were negotiating to use was up near the border with Jordan. The Jordanians also had a little problem with this construction. Not only was there a fear that transmissions from the station would cause political embarrassment to the government, the area in which the station was to be located was on a fly-way for migrating birds, and Israeli and Arab environmentalists just ripped the project plans apart. They said the birds would be injured by the wires in the tall towers that would be necessary for the transmission equipment. That alone put the project on hold for a long, long time.

Israel was also afraid that Israel fighter jets and military helicopters might be affected by the high energy levels put out by the transmission facilities. There was a suspicion that the emissions would interfere with the “fly-by-wire” control systems of several models in the Israeli inventory. Engineering tests over similarly powerful short wave transmitters in the U.S. confirmed the manufacturers' assertions that there would be no problem, but the Israelis were suspicious nonetheless. The area available for Israel to maneuver modern, high-speed aircraft is very limited and every square mile of the country is a part of their exercise area. The upshot was that the project was indefinitely stalled, while things such as the environment and military questions were sorted out. Politically, it got impossible to overcome such difficulties, particularly, I suspect, since it was also strong Israeli sentiment that the station would eventually be an embarrassment, so even as strong and dependent an ally as Israel could not stomach the positioning of a VOA relay station on its territory. The bottom line was the Israeli station could not be built and never will be. So we lost that one. Part of the need for that station was to improve the quality of the signal broadcast into the southern part of the then Soviet Union. But it took so long to put together that

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the politics of the moment and the dissolution of the Soviet Union took precedence, a very expensive, very long-term, very difficult agreement that Mort Smith had negotiated eventually had to be reversed.

A new relay site in troubled Sri Lanka was under way, and in Thailand we were converting what was a medium wave facility into a larger facility with a powerful shortwave capability. Still, we were searching for other locations. Korea was looked at, but politically it wasn't good. The Korean government felt they would find it difficult. They were just beginning to open ties with China, and they felt any major location of American propaganda radio on the shores of Korea would interfere with the smooth building of relations in the area themselves. Therefore, another stalwart ally got cold feet about cooperation with the U.S. on international radio. Besides, such a large scale project of construction would have set up a frenzy of land speculation in Korea, which the Korean government felt would be inimical to its plans for the reconstruction of the country's economy. So that one also went down the tubes.

We had been negotiating with the Philippines at the time, reworking the agreement with them. Those were the years of turmoil, the end of the Marcos era and beginning of the Aquino age in the Philippines. The Filipinos were beginning to be much more independent of the U.S. Even the ones who were strong friends of the U.S. would counsel against any major change in what was going on there, because they would be looked at as "American Boys." We couldn't go to Taiwan, because that would interrupt our own connection with China. That would be too blatant an insult to the Beijing we were struggling to keep in a moderate frame of mind, despite the recurrent MFN deliberations in Congress.

Q: How about Guam?

YATES: Tinian was the place of choice. Guam is a small place. It takes a lot of space to put in a relay station. You have to have large antenna fields. Guam is fairly well populated and you would have to buy people out. You need flat land that is relatively unobstructed.

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The take-off angle of the signal is upward, but for long distances, it should be as low an elevation as possible so as to minimize the number of physical “skips” that it takes to reach the target. Each skip reduces the amount of energy in the signal, so you lose clarity for the listener. You also need land that has the proper electronic characteristics in terms of sunlight and the location of large bodies of water. There is an incredible formula used to figure out where you can put these stations.

The only suitable place they could find was Tinian, an island with a mesa-like topography. There are relatively few jobs for the people who live on Tinian, and a relay station would be a fine opportunity for them. The other part of the opportunity is that a relay station needs lots power to boost a shortwave signal over long distances. This meant the installation of a very large power facility; without too much added expense, it could be over-built so that the local government would be able to draw off power from this facility and use it to build local industry without an enormous investment themselves. That kind of unique marriage of necessity and technical capacity was very rare. As far as I know, the Tinian station is progressing, but it has not yet been built.

It takes about ten years to put a station together. Very few remote areas have the railroads, docks, and other facilities needed to bring in fuel that make these things run. So it means far greater infrastructure building than would be normal in these areas. It is very complicated and takes a lot of money. When we go to the Hill with such projects, the relatively young people who serve on the committee staff must gain a fair bit of knowledge before being able to make reasonable recommendations about the modernization program. Yet getting them to understand the complexity of the program and why we needed ten years of money up front was an exercise in frustration. But we tried repeatedly. We were pushing that stone up the “hill” all the time. Invariably, it would roll back down, and we would try again.

It was very hard to get people to understand the purpose of all this and why we needed so much money. Why would the American taxpayer put money into building an expensive

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power facility on Tinian Island when Detroit was burning? It is a pretty hard argument to defend against. You can take the longer view and say if we do not maintain relationships with the rest of the world, we will lose jobs. Much of our industry is dependent on exports. Who buys the products we make? We certainly do not eat all the wheat we grow. The same can be said for other agricultural and industrial products. Much of our production is bought by peoples who listen to the Voice of Americapeople who learn about this country from the Voice of America and get to trust its products and people. #If we don't do a good job of communicating, we don't have good jobs back here. It gets that basic sometimes. For some reason, it seemed difficult for USIA to communicate such a fundamental idea to Congress, not to mention the legal prohibitions from communicating directly with the American public.

Q: It is a hard one. Did you run into the argument that the BBC is taking care of it anyway?

YATES: You can't hear the BBC in every place around the world either. China was one exception, because they had a very fine facility in Hong Kong. Don't ask me what is going to happen after reversion. The BBC previously used an island off Hong Kong where they had chosen to place their transmitter. From that point on, they were "5 by 5," as radio technical people say, with a very, very strong shortwave signal into China and, I guess, medium wave in Cantonese into nearby Guangzhou and its surrounding Cantonese-speaking area. In any event, the BBC does not explain the United States of America. It's not in their charter.

While you may get the news, which may be close to the way we might report it, the British radio does not explain us, and that is what is intended to be the principal responsibility of the Voice abroad. We were not out there, single-mindedly fighting communism, although that was certainly the rationale which was paraded on the Hill every time we went there for our budget. When the Soviet Union dissolved into its constituent republics, there was an open question about how much of the change was based on information or ideas derived

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from the Voice of America. I cannot shed any empirical light on the question, but it is just common sense that almost half a century of broadcasting likely had a special effect.

The basic economic system of the Soviet Union was no good, so it probably would have fallen eventually, no matter what the Voice of America said, but VOA probably had something to do with speeding up the process. A little bit of an investment in information goes a long way in removing a need for the much larger necessary investment in defense if the communist system had continued to spread. So we were hoist on our own petard. We became known as the commie fighters, fending off the red menace, but we had a much larger role in representing the U.S. to millions upon millions who probably never will visit the U.S. themselves.

USIA's essential role, its chief purpose for being, was the promotion of the US; building understanding for its policy, culture, and society; and stimulating an environment for trade. One of the larger part of these responsibilities is our educational exchange programs, such as the Fulbright scholarships and educational counseling. The education programs have been the basis for much of the understanding that we have developed with other countries over the years. Similarly effective is our international visitor program where we provide visits to the U.S. for people that our posts identify as potential leaders over the next decade or so. The multiplicity of program tools that USIA has been able to bring to bear on misunderstanding and ignorance is misunderstood.

The Voice of America, however, is a very different tool from the standard USIS programs that are used abroad. It is a passive tool in comparison with the intensely individual efforts that overseas posts make. You throw things into the wind and hope somebody will tune in. Someone has to turn you on and someone has to listen, sometimes at great danger to himself. In China or the Soviet Union, it was dangerous to do that. But people did and I think VOA provided a special service that was different from the other services provided by the USIS operation at the embassy. The USIS operations in any one country had a more personal approach. That meant leaving the desk and getting out into the university

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and sitting down in professors' offices, and talking to deans and students or visiting media where placement was always an objective. The question is, how many students can you talk to? These universities have tens of thousands of students. We try to talk to the students who are the best and probably the future leaders of the country, those who will be able to pass along the information we impart to them. So we put a lot of effort into defining our audience.

We have talked about that to some extent before when I discussed Japan. It is something that was an important part of our work. By focusing efforts on a smaller number of communicators, however, our numbers began to decline. The more efficient we got in identifying our audience, the smaller the number of select people we were addressing in a given country. Whereas the Voice of America could claim millions of people listening, we could claim only hundreds on a personal contact level. That doesn't necessarily mean one is better than the other. In fact, personal contact would likely have to be considered much more important. The one-on-one relationships that developed because of exchanges had much greater impact, I believe, partially because of a greater credibility and the selectivity involving one or several individuals that will probably have significant responsibility in the future affairs of their country. VOA serves a different purpose and, therefore, must be judged by a different yardstick.

One of the attributes of the Voice of America that is politically important in Washington is its utility as an emergency network for Americans abroad. Almost every traveler listens to the Voice of America, but originally it was not intended for Americans, but for a foreign audience. Yet until CNN became almost omnipresent in hotels around the globe, when you traveled abroad, about the only way to get American news was the Voice of America. Newspapers were late, if you could get them. Local media often had little or no interest in American affairs neither did BBC for that matter but you could rely on the Voice of America. News people and American travelers abroad were well served by the Voice of America. Each time there was an attempt to reduce programming, those folks would rise up in support that became an important part of VOA's justification. But that was not the

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justification for USIA efforts abroad in the embassies. So we had parallel tracks but very different constituencies and very different purposes and particularly different tools.

Q: Were you up against pressure groups, Cuban-Americans, Irish-Americans, etc.?

YATES: Absolutely. There was no question that was one of the most nettlesome, yet most advantageous support the Voice had. Every time we would come up with a budget cut, small services like Lithuanian would come under fire. You can't imagine the strength of the Lithuanian community in this country until you try to cut the Lithuanian service. They felt it was an important link to their homeland. It was a strong post to lean on in times that the Russians were trying to subsume the Lithuanian culture into the greater Russia. How many Lithuanians live in Cleveland, for example? You would be surprised to find out. They would all get together and write letters to their local congressman. There was a devilish cry of pain on the Hill every time we tried to cut any of those small services. It meant that all of the constituents would come out of the walls onto the congressional backs, and we would get rockets from the Hill saying we could not even think of such a move. They would earmark funds in the appropriation bill to make sure that didn't happen. So this sort of earmarking was an incredible bat with which to beat the Voice of America. You can argue that is a good thing, but at the time, something else had to give. You had to reduce Chinese or get rid of somebody else or some other service that we were doing.

One of the most important services of the Voice of America over the years, was the special English program. This was a program in which only about 1200 English words were used. This was like what the Reader's Digest does to ensure that its magazine is readable for all. All text is limited to those 1,200 words except when certain terms must be used to be clear. In such cases, the new term is fully defined in the vocabulary of the approved 1,200. This practice gives somebody who doesn't speak native English a much better grasp of what is being discussed. It allows them to practice their English without struggling to deal with the expanded vocabulary most often used by educated speakers of English. Special English is spoken very slowly, so that every word is pronounced clearly and distinctly,

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giving a non-native speaker of English a better chance to comprehend. Sometimes, it can become boring for an American native-English speaker to listen to, but it is very effective for English-as-a-second-language people and if there is heavy interference, a weak signal, or fading, the broadcasts in special English can be a relief even for native speakers who have a better chance of following the thought.

One good example of the utility of special English can be found in China. After I got there, it was clear that the Voice of America was being listened to with the blessing of the authorities. It was a practice that was followed even in the middle of the Cultural Revolution. On the face of it, that does not sound reasonable. But on examination, this remarkable permission made complete sense. The Chinese understood that their students would have to learn English to be competitive in world markets, and so they had to have the facilities such as language laboratories and native speakers to make their training effective. But China didn't have the money to spread a lot of English teaching resources all over the country.

However, the Voice of America special English broadcasts were free to them. Schools would assign their students to go listen to the Voice of America in English, not Chinese which was forbidden. Entire classes would listen to VOA at night and come into the class next day to review the lesson they had heard. It was remarkable. Often the content of special English programming was stories about America, the founding fathers, etc. To this day in China, there are people who know more than a lot of Americans do about Lincoln and Jefferson and Washington. They have learned it from the Voice of America and discussed that foreign history in their own schools as part of their language lessons. That simple program concept is a marvelous tool in getting this country more understood.

The payoff is when the political forces become realigned and there is an opening, a great welling up of interest in America. This is a very positive thing in international relations because of this vast groundwork that was done through Voice of America broadcasts to places like China in special English.

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Yet there was a serious problem. When reductions had to be taken and earmarking prevented the reduction of one or several of the smaller services, then budget cuts had to be made on the programming side. News was the heart of the program, so that was sacrosanct. The natural instinct would be to take cuts in the special purpose programming such as special English. You can't cut Lithuanian, and you can't cut Latvian, and Tibetan is a new service that the Congress has mandated. Radio Marti, over the objections of many, was going full force and sucking money away as fast as it could. TV Marti was even worse. Yet the budget was going down. Where do you take the cuts? Very, very important programs like special English had to take a cut and that was tragic. Such cuts meant that we were not using our money most efficiently and effectively. If you were a good Lithuanian from Cleveland, you had very strong feelings about the importance of Lithuania and you were probably right. But when you have limited resources and unlimited demand, where do you put on your brakes? I think many times we put on the brakes in the wrong places.

You mentioned Cuba, and particularly in Florida, the vote down there. Cubans are very strong in Florida. The log-rolling that goes on in Congress, of course, made a careful analysis of the broadcast effort to Cuba almost impossible. The principle of "you vote for my thing and I will vote for yours," meant that the Congressional delegation from Florida could jam an earmark through and force funding of a program that many felt was not cost effective. Radio Marti was a sacred cow and, more foolishly TV Marti, which has never had an audience, quickly followed in that tradition. The whole thing was a Looney Toons arrangement. You perhaps remember the aerostat balloons that they were going to put up to broadcast television into Cuba. Fidel Castro said that if the U.S. insisted on beginning such transmissions, he intended to increase the power of one of Cuba's AM radio stations that would interfere with U.S. radio stations deep in the U.S. heartland.

With sufficient power, particularly in the evening hours, medium wave exhibits some of the same characteristics as shortwave. Once the sun goes down, the ionosphere comes

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down to a point where medium wave radio signals no longer penetrate that layer of the ionosphere. That is why we have laws that restrict broadcasting on certain frequencies. Some stations could broadcast from dawn to dusk, but at dusk they had to power down or get off the air. The reason was that they could easily interfere with a broadcast station on the same frequency that presented no conflict during the day when distance alone kept them apart. AM signals, usually receivable only within a small radius about a urban area, could be heard 200 miles away after sundown. Anybody who ever lived in New England can remember tuning in to WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia almost as soon as the sun went down.

Q: Oh, yes, I used to hear it.

YATES: Yes. The ionospheric shift is the reason why you heard it at night but not during the day. Once the shift set in after sundown and the bounce came down in the right spot, WWVA was loud and clear.

TV Marti, of course, gets into the whole issue of the Berne Convention. The Berne Convention is the set of rules and guidelines that the entire world uses to allocate frequencies so that stations will be kept from running into each other internationally. Radio waves don't respect national boundaries. They bounce all over the place. Every couple of years, nations meet in Bern to decide who gets what frequencies, so that we don't clash. That doesn't always work, but most countries have laws prohibiting foreigners from broadcasting in their territory through most of the radio spectrum. The particular exception, of course, is shortwave radio which, by definition is international. Rupert Murdoch is a good example of the application of that sort of law in the US. He had to become an American citizen to buy into the American media.

The fundamental question was whether or not our planned TV broadcasts into Cuba were legal. The VOA legal watchers said "No." Shortwave is the only recognized medium for international radio broadcasting. Medium wave is not. There are some border areas where

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two cities are in close proximity where some sort of accommodation is necessary, but in general, medium wave is considered to be a local signal intended for a national audience.

Medium wave is a greater problem than FM signals, because a medium wave broadcast can follow the curvature of the earth a bit even without a bounce. FM, on the other hand, is direct, line-of-sight without any bounce. Signals from FM broadcasts pass straight through the ionosphere without a bounce, no matter what power is used at the transmitter. For hard technical reasons, if you can't see the antenna, you are not going to hear the broadcast. That is a slight exaggeration, for few people keep their eyes on their local TV or FM broadcaster's antenna, but that is essentially the technical limitation of the signal. For that reason, regional broadcasters of TV or FM need very tall antennas. Your TV set may have ghosts or reflected signals, but it will not receive over-the-horizon. This is the reason for the popularity of cable TV, as those in the "shadow" of a hill or large building will still be able to receive their favorite channels interference free.

The Voice of America participates in the Berne discussions and the gentleman's agreement to abide by the international conventions. So those gradations in the radio frequency spectrum are important to the Voice of America, determining what you can and cannot do. We have VOA medium wave broadcasts from Thailand, Costa Rica, and Sri Lanka. Since local governments almost universally insist that VOA not broadcast from its transmitters directly to local populations, how is it that VOA broadcasts medium wave, FM, or TV anywhere?

In fact, everyone looks the other way. Shortwave has an interesting technical characteristic that jumps over the problem of local populations tuning in. In the Philippines, for example, the Voice of America shortwave facility is very hard to hear. If you go down to North Carolina where we have a large relay station and turn a shortwave radio on, you can't hear the Voice of America, but in more distant parts of the U.S. you can. Why? Because the average skip is about 500 miles, and if you are within the radius of the first skip, there is no signal to receive. Since shortwave is an international medium, engineers design

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antennas to have a “take off” angle of elevation to maximize the feed of energy into as narrow a beam as possible, thus placing the strongest possible signal on the target area. Antennas must be designed so that you are not projecting your energy to nearby areas at the expense of the target.

That leaves the problems with Radio Marti and TV Marti. Cuba is a long way from the continental US. It is even too far from the Florida Keys to permit a normal broadcast station there. Searching for a solution, we talked to the National Guard about TV Marti putting a television broadcast operation up in the air off Cuba in international airspace to gain line-of-sight for the FM spectrum TV signal. Naturally, power was a problem, for no aircraft today can carry enough energy to power a truly effective TV broadcast operation, but a limited distance broadcast would be possible for short time periods. The National Guard had modified large cargo aircraft to broadcast radio and television from the air for psychological warfare equipment. There is a unit in Pennsylvania that does nothing but this. This is the psychological-warfare people, the clandestine operators whose objectives are linked with battlefield or tactical advantages and not the traditional overt USIA/VOA goals. The psychological-warfare people used these aircraft during the problems in the Caribbean, Grenada, and places like that. At that time, there was a question of how to get information to Americans on the ground there.

These aircraft were in fact used in Haiti. They would fly off the coast and make lazy eights while broadcasting. Radio is not bad because it is non-directional. You trail a wire out of the aircraft, and you can broadcast fairly easily for long distances. Television is not so easy. You have a broader bandwidth to broadcast, particularly in color, and much higher energy levels than are needed for radio broadcasting. So for TV signals, the National Guard was willing, even enthusiastic, to give it a try, a gutsy “can-do” spirit, but technically goofy.

After the possibility of a National Guard transport flying off Cuba was rejected, the question of aerostat balloons came to the fore. A few “visionaries” wanted to put up balloons with

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long wire antennas on them. Since TV operates in the FM spectrum, you have to have a line of sight. They designed a system of aerostat balloons that would be put up from islands in the Florida Keys from which a very high antenna would, theoretically, gain a line-of-sight with Cuba. Of course, that is an area of frequent and sometimes violent storms. No problem, said the advocates, the balloons could simply be hauled down and re-raised when the threat had passed. Surely that would mean that TV Marti would be off the air whenever the weather threatened, but they were undaunted.

At great cost (\$30,000,000 was earmarked for the first year budget from the Congress - naturally taken from the general appropriation for VOA modernization), the project was launched. Balloons blew down. It got comical in some cases. The engineers swore that the project was technically unfeasible, and the legal people said we were ignoring international agreements to which the U.S. was a party, but politics prevailed and the bleeding of money continued. There was intense congressional pressure to make TV Marti a reality despite the sense of farce. To our embarrassment, it was created and is still running. To this day, the best information I have claims that it is a total waste of money and probably cannot be heard in Cuba.

TV is not like a radio where you have a dial that you can run along the spectrum. Either you override signals that are already there or interfere with them, which is a blatant violation of international convention, or you pick channels that are not used to which people don't listen. So you are stuck on the television format. Additionally, putting out a television signal is very difficult. If you use the airplanes, there has to be one up all the time. That also means every time an airplane makes a turn, your signal disappears, so you are not be able to follow the program. It will finally come back so you can see it again, it is so highly directional. Balloons keep falling out of the sky, and there are a host of other technical problems.

But Congress could not or chose not to understand this. The only thing they had on their agenda was the Cuban vote in Miami; everything else was marginal. They took money out

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of the construction program, which delayed our sites abroad, to put it into Radio Marti and more wastefully, TV Marti. This meant millions of dollars committed for constructing relay stations abroad that we did need, were put into something we didn't need and probably would never make successful. We all knew that. But our political system being what it is and the inability or unwillingness of the Congressional staffers to understand these concepts was our downfall on this particular question.

I am trying to get back to the point I was trying to make when I started: our failing as an agency has been in Washington where we have not often had a full hearing on what USIA/USIS and the Voice were really doing and what the real value of our contributions were. In part, some of our problems were inherent in the manner in which the federal government operates. For example, we were hobbled by political appointees who, at times, were substandard and possibly even dumped in USIA when they did not make the grade in other agencies. It was always easy to get somebody out of one's hair by planting them where they would handle overseas activities. You couldn't put them in the Labor Department where somebody would see them. That was too bad, because it meant the professionals in USIA lost control and were saddled with people who did not know what they were doing. Some of them were nice people, but nevertheless, had no clue what we were doing abroad. Worse, they could not grasp the sense of mission, excitement, even duty, that kept the professional corps at work despite the senseless cuts, the petty politics, and the constant Congressional ham-handedness that afflicted the agency. That loss of the ideal essentially killed USIA.

Q: Okay, let's move on. You took Chinese. Can you tell me a bit about Chinese training? It was from when to when and what was your impression of the course?

YATES: I am not a great linguist to start with. The irony of my situation is that my three languages are Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. I had studied Japanese in University of Maryland courses while I was in the Army. I spoke enough of that to get along. My Korean was pretty good by the time I left Korea in 1972. Chinese, however, was a different

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animal. It is a very different language, not related to either Japanese or Korean, which have, in fact, a distant relationship between themselves. The Chinese is tonal and in word order and grammar resembles English more than it does Japanese, except for the characters that the Japanese picked up from the Chinese. The ideographs are one of the big problems for an English speaker, as he has to learn a whole different concept of written language. There is no phonetic alphabet in Chinese. They have created a Romanized equivalent system called “pinyin,” which is supposedly a crutch for foreigners, but in fact, may even get in the way. Some linguists have tried teaching only the Chinese characters, the ideographic approach. That is almost impossible, because if you are a well versed Chinese scholarly person, you would have at least 10,000 of those “drawings” under your belt. The Japanese have a limited set of about 1450 they call Toyo Kanji which allows you to read most sentences in newspapers, without the names of people and places that require a specialized vocabulary of their own. But one important difference between the Japanese and Chinese writing systems is the phonetic system the Japanese use to represent inflections and other mechanical parts of their language not present in the Chinese.

That phonetic system is called “kana.” It is broken into two separate subsystems, “hiragana,” the style of the usual inflections and language parts, and “katakana” the system that is used to phoneticize foreign names. The problem with the utilization of Chinese ideographs with the Japanese language is the dramatic number of homonyms that were forced into a language with only 50 sounds to represent the tens of thousands of Chinese characters. Since the Chinese ideographs carry the meaning in the visual presentation and were created for a language with different tones that can be applied to each phonetic group, the problem of homonyms is not as great. When the Japanese, who do not have a tonal system, adopted the Chinese characters as part of their writing system, they carried over close equivalences in sound, but without the tonal distinctions. Hence, the great difficulty with homonyms.

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The kana, on the other hand, allow you to keep on reading when you hit an unknown Chinese character and still get the gist of the sentence. You may have to substitute a verb or noun, but the basic structure of the sentence is clear. Korean is even more consistent in the use of phonetic representation. Hangul is their name for a phonetic representation, and there was a time when most government documents had no Chinese characters at all. Yet without the certainty of a Chinese character, there is still some possible confusion in written Korean. The Korean government has relented on that and Chinese characters have been re-introduced in government documents and into the educational system. They never were really removed from the names of people and places, but in normal language their use had been cut dramatically. So you can read Korean after you have a command of Hangul, which is a syllabary more than an alphabet, for it is represented by symbols grouped into representations of sounds.

So Chinese has many problems for the student. You have problems with the tones. If you misuse tones, you are unintelligible in Chinese. The second problem in Chinese is that you have a lot of dialects. If you go to Shanghai speaking Putonghua, which is the standard Mandarin, they could figure out what you were talking about, but the two dialects are not like Spanish and Portuguese, they are much more different. In either Shanghai or Beijing, people can read anything written by the other.

Still, writing with Chinese ideographs is a greater hurdle than reading, because it is an art form as well as a means of communication. You recall Mao Zedong and his little red book. Why a little red book? The reason was because Mao Zedong could not be understood by 90 percent of the people who lived in his country. His Hunan dialect was so strong that even people in Beijing could not understand what the devil he was saying. That is why he never gave speeches. If you have seen the newsreels of the time, you rarely heard Mao Zedong speaking. He might be filmed giving a speech, but it would be voiced over even for the Chinese audience. He gave few public speeches, for when he did, people often laughed at him. His country roots showed. Hunanese is different from other dialects

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and made him appear a “rube.” Traveling even short distances in China will bring you to a wholly different dialect. Mandarin is now the national standard, and most educated people have no problem with it. Yet if you go into the countryside, it is possible to find those who speak no Mandarin and do not understand its spoken form.

I entered the fray off schedule. I wanted to go to China because my wife, after taking Chinese studies at George Washington University, had just gotten a degree and was interested in going to China. I had bid on the job as PAO in Taipei, but that didn't work out. However, the spot as Deputy PAO suddenly became available in Beijing. I was picked for the job, and it meant I had to go into language training immediately, because the incumbent was leaving. This meant I was off-cycle from the usual startup of classes at the Foreign Service Institute, then in Rosslyn. Because of my Japanese and Korean background, they sent me to ICLS (the International Center for Language Studies) to try to use the extra time to brush up on my earlier study of Chinese characters. ICLS was a private school near the Treasury Building on 15th Street in downtown Washington. I think it is gone now.

The way ICLS worked was to hire mostly students studying in the Washington area who would agree to work a certain number of hours a week to support themselves in their studies. They were not really trained language teachers. I went there and started trying to get some of my Japanese Kanji and some of my few Korean Hanmun converted into Chinese characters. While the systems are similar, they use different techniques in writing. The Chinese use a simplified version of characters that the Japanese no longer use. The Japanese have simplified some, but simplified them differently. So you have the three languages. Korean is somewhere in the middle, using some of the older, more complex characters which the Chinese have now simplified. So you have simplified Chinese, you have the traditional Chinese which is used in Hong Kong and Taipei, and then you have the Korean style and the Japanese style. So it is a mishmash of stuff. The pronunciation is sometimes related, but while it is close enough to readily confuse, it is not always close

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enough to be understood. So you can't speak Japanese in China. It doesn't work. You can't do it in Korea either.

I was confronted with that and spent a couple of months of struggle. Then I shifted over to FSI and started basic Chinese there. I came into my basic Chinese studies with one foot half in and one foot half out. My spoken Chinese was almost zero, but my written Chinese was getting along pretty well. So it made for much confusion. My instructors decided to emphasize my written abilities, but that didn't work out too well. Finally, in exasperation, I went back to ICLS to try to sort out my unique set of problems where I did not have to march to the beat of other students. Then Tiananmen occurred.

Q: Will you explain what Tiananmen was?

YATES: Tiananmen was the student movement in Beijing in 1989. At the time, Gorbachev was visiting Beijing, and there was a large number of American and other international media there. An uprising of students in Tiananmen Square in central Beijing quickly got out of hand. It was broadcast virtually live to the world, because of the foreign media presence. I was in Washington trying to study Chinese with distraught Chinese instructors who had family, friends, and neighbors involved. I would go to school in the morning, and we would sit and watch television coverage in Tiananmen Square. So I didn't learn a lot of Chinese at ICLS at the time.

The incident, however, certainly brought home to me some of the emotional and cultural problems of the younger Chinese generation that were related to the incident. The uprising was broken up militarily and with cruelty that was shocking to the viewers abroad. The decision to do that was obviously a hard one for the Chinese government. I think the Chinese leadership did not really understand how much of this was getting abroad, and when they finally came to a realization of how much was getting out, they tried to pull the plug. There was that famous incident where the Chinese authorities confronted American technicians from CNN in a hotel room and ordered them to pull the plug on the camera.

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It was quite a dramatic scene in international press history. But that sort of excitement really screwed up my Chinese study. Consequently, I did not gain much proficiency in the language. I studied Chinese for less than a year and then went off to Beijing.

Q: You were in Beijing from when to when?

YATES: It was June when the uprising started and ran for about a month. They had evacuated non-essential Americans from Beijing. That meant my wife couldn't go in with me. I was given the green light to go ahead in August, 1989 and remained there until 1992.

Q: What was your job?

YATES: I was Deputy Public Affairs Officer. It was an interesting time to be in that position. I went into China through Guangzhou, also called "Canton." I flew there through Hong Kong, leaving my wife to spend some time with her family in Korea, because the evacuation order had not been lifted by that time.

The Deputy Public Affairs Officer in China had responsibility for all the USIS branches. We had four: in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Chengdu. At the time, we had no branch in Beijing, but we did have our headquarters there. That was later rectified. However, coming in through Guangzhou was important to me, because I had spent time on a couple of occasions before in Hong Kong. When you went to Hong Kong in those days, you would go up to the border and look across. So that part of my introduction to China was fun. I took the train in and was first struck by the lack of transition between the modernity and the expected antiquity of Guangzhou. It wasn't as shiny as Hong Kong, but it certainly wasn't so far away in terms of appearance. I looked for the "blue ants" but could not find them.

Q: Blue ants being?

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YATES: The stereotypical concept of the Chinese people, marching in lines all wearing a blue uniform with a red star on the cap. It wasn't that way at all. Guangzhou was a bustling place in 1989 and was exploding with economic activity. The place was a mess with construction. We had a USIS Center at the Garden Hotel with a residence for the Director at the White Swan Hotel, at one time, the most elegant hotel in Guangzhou. It had been quickly overtaken by the building of magnificent new hotels. The White Swan was right on the river, next to where they were putting a tunnel under the harbor. The hotel had been used by an American oil company for years, so right next door was a petroleum dump which was probably dangerous, and certainly unsightly. It was on an island in the Pearl River, slightly off the mainland. You had to cross several bridges to get to it. That location was probably chosen in earlier days when foreigners were looked on as a threat to the Chinese social order. On an island, the foreigners could be contained.

If you recall the Japanese history of Nagasaki, they put the Dutch on an island called "Dejima," apart from the rest of Japan, so they could essentially stand by the bridge and make sure the nasty Dutch didn't get into the real country. The Chinese probably had something like that in mind for the intruding Americans. Because the White Swan Hotel was on an island, it made the process very difficult for people to get to and, of course, made it very easy for the Chinese to control who got in and who got out. Nonetheless, it was a reasonably comfortable life for the people who lived there.

The most striking thing about Guangzhou when I went in was the accessibility of the people. On my first couple of days, I took a walk with the Branch Public Affairs Officer there. He knew where there was what they call an "English Corner" in the city during the weekend. We visited and I spent two or three hours standing and talking with students about anything that came into their heads. The Voice of America, what America was like, was the Washington Post really a "government" newspaper, and all kinds of interesting and sometimes surprisingly sophisticated questions. These were students who just wanted to practice English, but the substance and tenor of their questions had an edge. There

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were informers among them. You could see that every once in a while, they would look around to see who was listening and who wasn't. Most of them just didn't care. There in the park in Guangzhou I found a feisty Chinese spirit which I was a little bit surprised to see. Maybe I should have known better, because I had been in Korea, but the Chinese also are very independent-minded people. They are certainly not the "Blue Ants" and probably never were. That image, one of the "Scratches on Our Minds," came out of our MovieTone version of Chinese history. Peasants and people in the countryside who are not generally affected by these political tides may be willing to go along with the emperors in Beijing. The old Chinese saying, "Heaven is high and the emperor is far away," was probably one of the most characteristic things about the country, at least in Guangzhou. And the people in Guangzhou certainly were open. We talked freely about a large number of issues in that short period of time on a Sunday afternoon in the park in Guangzhou.

The questions flew. I stood in the middle of a big circle and the Branch PAO stood in the middle of another circle. There were not very many Americans running around China at the time, so we were centers of much attraction.

Q: When you arrived at Tiananmen, were you under any U.S. government constraints? We were pretty unhappy with the government of China for what they had done there and China was being made a pariah at that point. Were there any instructions on how to deal with the Chinese at this point?

YATES: Not in that sense, no. I had been in the Foreign Service for a long time and didn't have to be told to be careful when living abroad. You don't get out in front of things, and you are a government official regardless of your personal feelings. But my job and the job of the people I worked with, was not to pull the covers over our heads and sulk in the corner. I was there to find out what was going on and to find out whom we could talk to, to make solid contacts, and find a way to make them continue.

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For example, the Chinese had at that time put the squash on the Fulbright program. Most of the Fulbright grantees had left out of concern for their own safety. Many of the American English teachers had left. At the time, the Chinese accused us of plotting this, that the Fulbrighters had been told to leave by the American government and the Chinese really believed that. It was not true and we knew that, but they were not willing to accept our word on that issue as truth. Their view was not a matter of dogma. In their society, if the government doesn't want something to happen, it does not. If the government does want something to happen, it does. Most Chinese officials generally assumed that in the U.S., it works the same way. Since all of the Fulbrighters decamped, as well as many of the private English teachers, the assumption was the U.S. government orchestrated it, particularly since the U.S. had arranged for evacuation flights that were available to the people who wanted to leave Beijing.

The Chinese understanding of this was that we were ordering Americans out of China, but it never was required. We can't morally tell an American where to go. We can advise and make it possible for them to leave. In fact, the jets that were chartered did not always leave full. There were a lot of people who stayed in China and did not want to leave. The Chinese should have looked around a little bit and done a bit more inquiry, but they were very unhappy with the way the American government had carried out the evacuation and were not shy in expressing their displeasure. The Chinese were also very unhappy about the role of the Voice of America in Tiananmen.

Q: When you say the Chinese in that context, you are talking about the about Chinese government?

YATES: Yes, certainly the Chinese government. But you also have to understand something that is characteristic of other parts of Asia as well. There are a lot of people in China who are what we would call patriotic, the Radical Right, who are true-blue, flag-waving, nationalistic people who believe in the dogma that we find so reprehensible. Our image of that dogma is colored by our own understanding of it, and it is not always

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very clear. Remember back in the John Stewart Service days after the Second World War, when we went through this whole business about China? He and other American diplomats in China had seen in China something that others, particularly the American media, either didn't see or were not willing to admit.

They understood that China was a communist nation and the communists were in control, but the Chinese were still Chinese in feelings, outlook, and prejudices. It must be recalled that the American government in its actions following the Second World War was not very well informed about what was going on in China. When Foreign Service folk like Service tried to shed some light on it, they were soundly and swiftly booted out under charges of all kinds of dark motives and as being closely sympathetic to the "red" cause. That action caused much trouble for the American nation in the years following, for not only was it bad scholarship, it was bad faith in the very American principles the long Second World War had been fought over.

The attitude of the Chinese people had to be divorced from that of the government, but the Chinese shared a perception of the U.S. which is not always what we would understand. We think of the masses in chains as a kind of concept that represents an oppressed people. As soon as you unlock the chains, they are going to run free. That is not the case. In fact, that happened during the Tiananmen incident. One of the fundamental rationales that was used by the Chinese government in suppressing the students was the prevention of anarchy. Any student of Chinese history can look back and see an incredible amount of anarchy in the past which has destroyed the nation, or at least led to darkness many times. Many regimes fell because of disillusion among the people and resulting chaos. That is the basic reason so many of the people in the countryside did not support what the students were doing in the city.

Seventy percent of the Chinese people live in the country. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if much of that seventy percent didn't like what was going on, it would not be long before an effort was made to turn it off. If you have thirty percent of the

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population, that is most of the urban, educated Chinese, in support, you can make a big dent. And they did. But it wasn't enough to prevail, and it had no chance of being enough. Remember again in Chinese history, Mao Zedong's revolution occurred not in the city but in the countryside. It was his ability to organize the peasants that made the revolution possible. It was Mao Zedong's use of that technique which made it successful. In Shanghai, where the communists really started in the early part of the century, certainly after the 1918 revolution in Russia, the movement there was city-bound. It had no success whatsoever in China. There was a lot of politics, a lot of running around, but there wasn't any real success until Mao Zedong came onto the scene and organized the peasants. When those peasants were brought together, that was the first time that their movement stood a chance. If you don't bother the peasants, the Chinese government will continue. The demonstration in Tiananmen Square was not a mass revolt.

To say China was in chains is a metaphor that comes readily to hand, and there certainly were economic chains, but I am not sure you can say there were political chains. After about three years living and working in the country, I certainly do not have enough information to draw firm conclusions, and most media do not either. The political chains in effect were most evident in the cities. The countryside was still much like the old China, with the old attitudes. The farmers did not like collective farms, and that was clearly an episode in Chinese history that made the countryside unhappy, but that was the first thing to go under the reforms. The old rural collectives are essentially gone, transformed into private plots or coops where there are not enough resources to support smaller farms.

It was not until Deng Xiaoping freed the farmers to do their own thing, sell their own produce, and invest their own accumulating capital that the countryside began to prosper relative to the cities. That is where capitalism started in China, not in the industrial zones or in the urban areas. The large state-owned industries were dead in many cases and some still hang on in a morbid state of preservation. It was in the countryside where the farmers began to produce their own goods and foster the return of capitalism to Chinese soil. Deng Xiaoping and his policy was in the Mao Zedong tradition of looking at the

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Chinese peasant as the source of change in China. He was also probably accurate, in his terms, that the rebellion in Beijing had to be put down, because it would have engendered chaos, a loss of confidence by the large rural population in China. In 1989 when Tiananmen occurred, even some of the students were in agreement that the demonstrations had to be shut down. The question was, how far could the government let it go?

When the industrial workers, the media, and some of the government agency people began to march in the square, the glove had been thrown down. Probably from the standpoint of the demonstrators, that was the mistake that destroyed the movement. Lacking the support of others in Beijing who were largely government workers, the movement was dying. Things were fizzling, because it was wet out in the square, it was cold, there were hunger strikers, and things were not good, they were beginning to fall apart. It was not until some of the major elements in Beijing, workers groups, got involved for a variety of their own reasons that the troops were brought heavily to bear. If you remember, when the first advance of troops tried to enter the square, they were turned around by the citizens of Beijing, as it were, simply getting in the way.

A lot of these first troops lived in the city. It wasn't until they brought troops from elsewhere, troops not related to the garrison around Beijing, that they were able to put full military force on the students. And even then, you remember the line of tanks with a single student waving his book bag; he stopped the whole line until the driver popped out of the turret and said "Get out of the way." The tank tried to go around him and could not, so the whole column stopped. A famous picture.

Why did the column stop? This was a fly in front of them compared to the events surrounding the square. What prevented the commander from running over him and continuing to the square, like all tyrants would have done? They stopped. American television made much of the courage of the student. There was no question he had a lot of courage and was a strong individual. But don't forget the soldier who had the controls in

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the tank and stopped and the tank commander who said, "No, don't run him over." What possessed that tank commander? I believe the reason was that the Chinese have an ethic which runs deeper than the roots of communism and military training and transcends all else, bringing the column to a halt. They do have respect for the individual. There are billions of individuals. That is not seen very much in our media concept of the Chinese.

Q: I think we should come back to your time. What was your impression of the consulate general in Guangzhou?

YATES: As I mentioned, it was isolated. At that time, the Chinese had cut off most relations with Americans. We had been shut out. You couldn't get meetings with people, you couldn't move around. There were all kinds of excuses: "I'm busy. It's inconvenient today, maybe some other day," etc. But the bottom line was, you didn't get meetings with people. We were building a Guangzhou USIS Center at another hotel, the Garden Hotel, apart from the consulate. It was largely finished by the time I arrived. The Branch PAO and I looked at the place. The installation had some flaws, but it was well located. It was essentially in a store front inside the hotel on the mezzanine level. The problem was, it was not downtown on a street corner, so it meant rag-a-muffin students would be uncomfortable in that place. Yet it was good for young professionals, intellectuals, and people who had some cachet in the government and who found it an interesting, clean, and different place to go. So it probably was as good as we could have obtained, given the political situation of the time.

In the new USIS Center at the Garden Hotel, we were not confined to the island, where we were apart. Although there was a great effort to "save" some undefined resources and move back onto the isolated island, that move would have been disastrous for a public affairs program. The Garden Hotel was expensive, but given that it was the only chance we had to get to people, that was a good move.

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On several occasions in my trips to Guangzhou, I participated in a series of programs in which the Branch PAO was bringing in Americans who lived in the town to meet with Chinese. The reason was ostensibly to study English, but the young professionals, doctors, business people, graduate students, and even a couple of lawyers all had very wide interests. They were not a large group, 15-20, maybe 30, people at a time. Their English was fair, and they wanted to know about America. The Chinese are always interested in your personal life. On a later occasion, I was one of the Americans who went down there and sat with a group of young professionals and talked about life in America, politics, what Americans think about, freedom and liberty and all those good things which we never dreamed the Chinese would be allowed to talk about. Because it was a foreign environment, they felt a little bit more at ease, although there were obviously people among them who were reporting back on who was saying what and what questions were asked. That was deemed to be acceptable to the participants, perhaps because the “watchers” were relatives or friends.

I think those programs went a long way in helping to reach people who we would later call agenda setters. The branch in Guangzhou was important. Guangzhou is different from the rest of the country. People there were not interested in politics. It is a culture with a different language and culture. Guangzhou was the source of a lot of people who came to the US, so many people there had relatives in America in one place or another. That gives Americans, I guess, a special entree. But at that time, it was difficult for us to program speakers in Guangzhou, because they didn't want to talk about politics. They would talk about business. You could bring in an economics speaker and have wall-to-wall people. You would try to bring somebody in concerned with politics, and you wouldn't get anywhere. So we had to confine ourselves pretty much to economic questions in Guangzhou.

From there, I moved up to Shanghai on my initial trip to Beijing. Shanghai is a different city and had a different kind of clientele. As Deputy PAO, I had responsibility for a book-

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translation program that, interestingly enough, was started by John King Fairbank back in the late '40s.

Q: He later became a “father” of Chinese studies at Harvard.

YATES: He is the grand old man of Chinese studies in the US. He wrote one of the best books on Chinese history available to American students. In the '40s, he started a book translation program. There were 18 titles in his original program, and the process was essentially to pick titles, translate them into Chinese, and pass them out. I inherited a variation of that program in Beijing and had a fair amount of dealings with various publishers across China. In Shanghai, there were several large publishing houses that we were doing business with, so I became much more familiar with Shanghai than I did with some of the other cities.

Shanghai is to Beijing about what New York is to Washington in the US. It is the commercial capital of northern China. Guangzhou is the commercial capital of the south. Shanghai has the biggest port and the strongest connections with the West. That city was home to a large number of expatriates prior to the Second World War, and the famous Bund is exemplary of a European colonial seaport street. Most people would remember that Shanghai of the old bank buildings, the customs house, and the old colonial appearance that provided the live set for period movies. It was in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Shanghai that the communist movement found its origins.

The Branch PAO in Shanghai has probably as much responsibility as most small country Public Affair Officers in the world because of the strength of the community and the size of the problem we deal with. It was the place where we had our last U.S. military ship visit, for example, before our relations fell apart. Those visits, by the way, have just started again. There was a burgeoning opening in a Shanghai that was under restraint, but nonetheless possessed the latent possibilities for a very productive program since there was such an enormous interest in international affairs and trade.

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That is also where I met a number of Chinese lawyers who thought they had a chance of making a dent in the Chinese legal system, which essentially did not exist. China doesn't have a system like we have. They have no tradition of a rule of law that we would recognize and that is so sacred to our own way of living. In China, society is ruled by fiat or something resembling a Germanic code. If somebody has to make a decision on someone doing something wrong, it is done by judge, not by a jury of peers. Equality before the law is not a concept that is common in China. So lawyers have a problem. There are laws, but they are aimed at regulating process in the society rather than to moderate social actions by individuals. Most people are untouched by laws other than traffic regulations and a few political dicta. Otherwise they are not generally aware of a concept of equality before the law. As law becomes more of a way of operating both business and social discourse, legal people become more important. Shanghai is where that effort is beginning.

We had problems in Shanghai because our USIS office was on the consulate grounds. One of the problems of all consulates in China is that they are surrounded by guards. After Tiananmen, steel helmeted, automatic-weapons-equipped troops were stationed about every 15-20 feet in a ring around the consulate compound. It wasn't something that would encourage people to come in to participate in public affairs programs.

We also had a problem with being part of the consulate, because it attracted enormous numbers of people just wanting visas. Shanghai is the business center of the north, and there were always a lot of people wanting to get visas. Every morning, there was a long line outside. It was like a railroad station every day. It was not very easy for distinguished people to come in and go to a program at the USIS Center. Our facilities at the consulate were in a "shed" at the back of the property, literally above a large storage space. They were totally unsuitable for us. To get to our offices, staff and guests had to walk through the consulate gates, past the main building, and down through the consulate garden. This route, of course, drove the security people wild. Arriving at the USIS offices one had to go through a portal where there were sheets of plywood lying around, a fork lift

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vehicle, and other items used to maintain the embassy. Then you had to walk up a flight of stairs, above one of the storerooms into a kind of “garret” arrangement where we had our program facilities and a library. Having the library in that sort of situation was not very smart, since nobody ran such gauntlet to visit a library.

So we had to get offices outside. As soon as I arrived, it was abundantly clear and the Consul General at the time agreed that we had to have different facilities. So we started our search for quarters. We did find something pretty close to the consulate, but in an independent building with no overbearing security control, at least not with automatic weapons and tin hats.

Q: Was the security control designed to discourage Chinese from coming to the post?

YATES: That and more, for it was also, I believe, designed to keep us in. To keep an eye on us. The Chinese were very suspicious of Americans in China at the time. They weren't protecting us because nothing dire happened in China without official blessing, so if our “protectors” wanted to turn their weapons on us, we had no security at all. If they wanted to come in, they would come in. It was clear that if the Chinese government (# la Iran) decided that the students should give the Americans their comeuppance, we were naked there in the wind. They were not protecting us much. Perhaps because of the very severe penalties for robbing or harming a foreigner in China, we were not bothered much by burglaries or other criminal threats. It was at once secure and not secure.

On the other hand, the Chinese forces surrounding us were there to control Chinese access to us. Every Chinese person who approached the consulate was stopped by the Chinese guards and asked what they wanted. Their names and “danwei” membership was recorded. A “danwei” is a work unit. Their unit identification was looked at, and it was reported back to their superiors what they were up to. So it wasn't easy for a Chinese citizen to walk up to the consulate and go in unless he had an official reason to do so. Usually they required an official letter from us and official approval from their danwei to

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make a visit. So they had pretty strong locks on their citizenry. It wasn't always successful in keeping people out, and we tried to the extent possible to make it easier for people to enter. Yet being at the consulate really kept us out of the mainstream. So we had to move out. Once I had looked into the issue of the book publishing program in Shanghai, I was free to begin to look into the access problem.

Q: How were books selected?

YATES: That was a program I ran after I got to Beijing. When I arrived, it had close to a 100 titles in process of some sort or either under consideration, had been published, or were in the process of being worked on. The process was a little complicated. We did the translations in Beijing itself. The basic principle of the program was to put the best of American writing in the hands of Chinese in a manner that most educated people could access. We didn't have a lot of money to use for the project, but what we could offer the Chinese was an ability to find good materials that were worthy of translation and assist them in bringing a translation to print. We would buy the first 2,000 volumes of the resulting Chinese edition, hard bound. This was not a big money-making operation for publishers, but it did provide U.S. dollars, hard currency, which most of them put into Hong Kong accounts.

We had about 32 Chinese publishers who were in the program. Among them was the People's Liberation Army Press, and this caused me a bit of surprise. Particularly in the aftermath of Tiananmen, what was the People's Liberation Army Press doing publishing USIS selected American titles in Chinese and selling them in the market? The Chinese, on the other hand, saw nothing amiss, but did prefer to stay solely on military biographies and military issues.

One of the characteristics of this program was that we would provide the material and buying the translation rights, if needed, through USIA in Washington. Once we had the rights, we would enter into a commercial contractual arrangement with the Chinese

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publisher, giving them an up-front payment for about 2,000 volumes. This didn't amount to much money, because in China books are pretty cheap, thirty to forty cents a copy. Sometimes we would contribute to the translation costs, but not very often. We tried to make it as much of a commercial operation as possible.

The company would translate the volume with people we approved as translators, give us a manuscript of the translation. We would then send it to Hong Kong where Chinese who were not communists would take a look at it to make sure it was a good translation, the language was appropriate to the text and that it was done in a manner we could put our name to. Not all of them got through. As a matter of fact, about half of them didn't. They were heavily edited in Hong Kong and sent back to the publisher through us for reworking. When a final approval of the manuscript came back from Hong Kong, the publisher would publish the book and we would take our copies. The other copies of the book would then be put on sale in the Chinese market, with all profits going to the Chinese publisher. In the case of the Peoples' Liberation Army Press, we expected most copies would be handled through military channels, but that was fine with us since the military was the most natural audience for the kinds of things put into translation. Commercial publishers put a fair number of the titles out through the Chinese commercial distribution system. One might suspect that the publishers simply pocketed the hard dollars we paid and dumped the rest of the run, but we did random checks of book stores and government outlets to see if our titles were making it out.

And, that happened. I was in Nanning a couple of years later and took some extra time to wander in the local bookstores. That was one of my habits as I traveled about China. Nanning is way down by the Vietnamese border, far off the beaten track. There were not even very many tourists there, certainly not very many Americans. I was down there for a conference. If time allowed, I would would prowl around the bookstores and look for our titles in each city I visited. And, sure enough, I found one of our translated titles on American nuclear policy in a bookshop in Nanning. That to me was very gratifying. It

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showed the books were getting out and were available to the Chinese to buy if they had the money.

Usually the publisher would put out a hardback edition as the first 2,000 or so copies that we purchased as part of the publication agreement. We used those copies for presentations when we made visits to Chinese offices. In most of Asia, people have a great deal of respect for the printed word. If you can give a person a gift of books, that is a compliment to them, because you are acknowledging that they have the intellectual prowess to have an interest in serious work. They often would place them in a prominent bookcase in their office or take them home to enjoy in private. Always they were appreciated. Books on the shelf of one's home were the mark of an intellectual man. So the 2,000 copies that we received were used by our Beijing Officers and Branch Officers as gifts. The rest of the print run, however, usually was prepared in paperback binding because they were cheaper for the individual to purchase.

We had about 100 titles which were chosen by us. My role was to select titles, approach publishers who might have a special interest in that subject matter, and make an offer to have the title published. In regard to the selection process, we gathered ideas from various sources. For example, we had a Fulbrighter who was working up in Shenyang at a university. She was in Beijing for a visit and said one of the things that surprised her a lot in teaching about America was the enormous interest in the American West and American Indians in particular. The Chinese seemed to take to this idea of a frontier mentality. Possibly it was the romance of the noble Indian that attracted them. So out of that comment grew the idea to put together a series on the American West in translation into Chinese, which we did. Everything from Larry McMurtry right back to some Indian writers, Indian poetry. The Fulbrighter agreed to help compile a short list of titles that would appeal most to her students. Her final list was edited a bit and then shown to a number of publishers who were asked if they would be interested in doing a series. In Asia, as in many other countries, people like to collect things in series. This was to become a series on the American West. A publisher was selected and the series got under way. As far as I

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know, it was completed. I think there were 12 volumes in all. It encompassed a wide range from the Lewis and Clark diaries, and "The Virginian," through the expansion westward. Part of the appeal of the American Indian to the Chinese was the chance to read about the freedom and spirit, particularly the Indian philosophy of identification with nature. That made a lot of sense to those steeped in the teachings of Taosim which has a similar point of view.

Another series we did later on was on American law. In the U.S., there is a book publishing company which specializes in notes for law students, "The Nutshell" series. It is intended to provide a student in an American law school a quick review of a particular subject like tort law, civil law, commercial law, or human rights. In this series, there also were about a dozen volumes. We were able to get this series published, and they sold out very quickly.

One of the most popular books that we had in the program was a book by Len Bernstein, "The Joy of Music." That one the publisher couldn't keep in print. There was another volume on American dance, which wouldn't sell here at all; it vanished overnight in the bookstalls in China. Some of the stuff didn't move fast, volumes on policy and other deeper subjects didn't move very quickly, but other things they liked.

I mentioned the People's Liberation Army Publishing House. I arranged a meeting with a representative of the press. That was a difficult process, since you could not call to an Army number directly. You had to go around a long route and pass a verbal or written message to the person you wished to speak with and get that person to call you. The telephone exchanges in Beijing are not interconnected. I found out later that it isn't in North Korea either. The military has a separate exchange, its own system. So if you want to talk to the military, you essentially have to send a letter, because they can't call you. They have to go to some place outside the military compound to call you. Anyway, I made an arrangement with the publisher. I could not go to his military compound for the meeting, so we arranged to meet for lunch at a hotel.

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At the lunch, there was a Senior Colonel, the equivalent of a brigadier general in our parlance, myself, and a couple of his people. I told him that this was post-Tiananmen, and I could understand his reluctance to continue with this program. I offered that we might postpone it for a while. I would leave it up to him. He said, "Not at all. We want more titles and I have some specific ideas." He wanted to do books on Eisenhower, on Marshall, and biographies of other military leaders, obviously for training reasons. That was okay. The military is an important audience for us in our efforts to communicate with possible future Chinese leaders. They were willing to go along, so we continued. We did books essentially on American military subjects. With the Peoples' Liberation Army Press, we had plans to do several longer books on American naval history, but we hadn't gotten started on that by the time I left.

For most publishers, we tried to select books that appealed to a wide spectrum. "Habits of the Heart," for example, is a book on social issues. The most important series that I worked on was the "Library of America." In the US, I don't see much of it advertised any more, but it is a basic collection of 40 or 50 volumes of American writing, most now in the public domain. It is the collected works of Lincoln, Thoreau, Poe, Hawthorne, the big presences in American culture. It is a very respected series, because they picked the best of those writers and did very careful editing. I got the best publisher we had in Beijing to gradually work through that series. These volumes are about 1,200-1,500 pages each. They are printed on non-acidic, very thin paper so that it can fit on your bookshelf, but they are massive volumes of collected writings. There were the collected works of Mark Twain, Faulkner, etc.

The publisher very much wanted to do the series with the same level of quality and seriousness. So we made an arrangement with the Library of America in New York, a non-profit organization devoted to encouraging an appreciation of the best of American letters. That program worked. It is still in progress. They use the Library of America logo and it is promoted as the Library of America. Financially, it is probably a great loss to the

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publisher, except that they get some foreign currency from the ones we buy and have their logo on a very prestigious series. Nonetheless, the program, itself, is a deficit operation for the publisher since each copy in the final version costs about \$3, but while that is less than 10% of the U.S. price, it still is too expensive for the usual Chinese consumer. Yet the publisher wanted to do it because it was a prestige item for them. This was the best of American work in a very scholarly format that would present American thought and ideas, Thoreau, for example. Emerson was in one of the volumes first published.

A little side note on the volumes of the Lincoln papers that we had selected for inclusion in the series. When I selected a list of titles for possible translation, I would send it back to USIA which would then buy them and send them out for a complete review prior to offering them to a publisher. I had received a two volume set on the Lincoln writings which included his speeches and letters, etc. I had them in the office and had already set up a time to consult with a publisher when I received a call from the ambassador's office saying, "We hear you have two volumes of Lincoln." I said, "Yes." "We need them this afternoon." "Why?" It turns out that the ambassador was going to see Jiang Ze Min.

Q: The head of state?

YATES: Yes. Jiang Ze Min is a Lincoln fan. He has great respect for his writings, so the ambassador wanted to present him with the most distinguished set that he could quickly lay his hands on. That was the set that I had planned to use with the Chinese publisher that afternoon to begin the process of its translation into Chinese. I had to give it up, and as far as I know, my two volumes of Abraham Lincoln are sitting on Jiang Ze Min's bookshelf today. This underscores again the importance of literature and books. Jiang Ze Min has a favorite habit of quoting to visiting dignitaries small portions of the Gettysburg Address or other utterances of American notables like Lincoln. It floors people who come to see him. Lincoln has an incredible following in China.

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Q: Did you find that the “Federalist Papers” rang any bells? The reason I mention this, is in an interview I was doing yesterday. We talked about how, when Helmut Schmidt was chancellor of Germany, he used to quote the “Federalist Papers” in the Bundestag and most people would respond. They had read it. You didn't have to say this was an American thing. He would just say in the “Federalist Papers” number 3, etc. This was the guts of American government.

YATES: Of course, Germany has a federalist system and maybe there is more direct connection there. The Chinese don't have a federal system. I can't honestly tell you that the Federalist Papers have a strong resonance in China. Certainly not to that degree. But I think it is fair to say that the Chinese have a great respect for the writings of our founding fathers, at least those they know. Where we have a better shot with the Chinese is from people like Thoreau. The idea of civil disobedience is, of course, a hot one in China, but a more fundamental concept that is popular with the Chinese is Thoreau's thoughts about man's relationship to nature. This is similar to the attraction to the philosophy of the American Indian mentioned earlier. If you look at Chinese art, that same relationship between man and nature has been exhibited for many centuries. So the Chinese find resonance with this kind of thing more than the overtly political thought that is represented by the Federalist Papers. Maybe now with the new legal movement in China, there is a possibility that some very important people will find that kind of connection with American thinking. So an important part of the book program was to have this kind of intellectual spread. Within the book program was art, a dose of literature, letters with a strong smattering of American political philosophy (Lincoln, Jefferson and Hamilton), etc.

Q: You were saying that Edgar Alan Poe was included.

YATES: Yes, that was a surprise to me. Certainly he is an important writer in American literary history, but my feeling was there were more important writers to include. It was a case of concession to the publisher. The publisher felt that Poe would be a successful volume. He thought that he could sell Poe even at a high price because of the high

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Chinese knowledge of that writer. Recall that in Chinese history, our first point of contact was the missionaries who had a penchant for forming schools. There are still a fair number of Chinese intellectuals out there in the woods who were schooled in these American missionary-run schools. What the missionaries taught were things that they knew about, and that included a lot of American authors. So Faulkner, Hemingway, Poe, all are authors that the Chinese have followed over the years. If they haven't read them, at least they know about them.

Mark Twain also has a big following there. The Tom Sawyer adventures, of course, are well known. Other popular titles, things like *Gone With the Wind* are well known to Chinese readers. When I was there, we weren't involved in titles like that, but remember when the sequel to *Gone With the Wind* was published? It was called *Scarlet*, and, I guess, it did not have a very good reputation in the American market. I haven't read it and wouldn't have anything to do with it as part of our translation programs. However, one of the publishers was deep into it and translated the entire volume of *Scarlet* in a very short time. He had an over-night best seller which sold out as soon as it hit the bookstores. The second printing was also immediately sold out. It was a great commercial success.

Although we had no program interest in it, the Chinese reading public was eager to get it even at the great price it commanded in the market. It also gave me the clue that there was a willingness to part with money if the book were really desired. The market, like most things in China, is vast and the publishers stand to gain a lot of money if they have something that even a very small percentage of the Chinese public finds of interest. So our primary publisher in Beijing that handled the Library of America, for example, knew that once he got it, he would still have it when the market matured. He was the man on the spot with an approved translation which was co-sponsored by the American Embassy, as it were, and would then be able to take the premier leadership, like Hollywood. The first one out gets the worm.

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Q: Looking at strategy, when you were at the embassy during this difficult time, 1998-92, when relations vis-a-vis the Chinese mainlanders were in the deep freeze more or less, what was the strategy? Did you sit down and figure out that this was what we should do during this particular time?

YATES: Yes. The approach following Tiananmen in 1989 was largely keeping body and soul together. The Chinese had systematically cut USIS out of much of the discourse that was going on between the two countries and there was official antagonism. That antagonism wasn't very deep, however, and it was possible to penetrate this kind of official wall they had built around us. As I mentioned before, they had put guards around all of our installations. They never interfered with an American coming and going, unless he or she were a Chinese-American, but they did interfere with our visitors and Chinese staff. So our main business at that time was to hold the organization together and keep the American morale up. Branch PAOs, who had access to many people before, could no longer see them. Telephone calls were not returned. Attempts to visit schools or make office calls were shunted aside. The Fulbright program was flat. Candidates for the international visitor's program could not get approved.

They have a system in China called the Waiban. He is sort of a gatekeeper for foreign visitors and relationships with foreigners. The Waiban has to approve any kind of contact. Beyond that, each individual work unit, or "danwei" as they call it, has to discuss it with the individual and they have to have their work unit approve it first before the contact is made. Then it has to go through the Waiban and the appropriate ministry. You can imagine in a bureaucracy the size of China's how difficult this was. The upshot was that we were not getting anywhere. We had no Fulbright program, no exchange program, and people generally would not come into our facilities. We had to start from zero again.

We were lucky, because we had a large group of local employees who could get access. We could get out of the office and where the Chinese had a particular interest, like the publishing program, they were happy to continue the relationship. Publishers, for example,

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gave very firm assurances that nothing important would change. They would continue, but we must be discreet about how we did business. They didn't want trouble, but they didn't want to kill the golden goose either.

Q: When you tell about being discreet, did you also feel that we should be somewhat discreet because of public and media pressure in the United States that we don't want to be too cozy with these Chinese because of Tiananmen?

YATES: That may be a factor in the relations between the political, economic, and other sections of the embassy, but our USIS business was not so influenced. Our business is establishing ties. That doesn't mean coziness but enough contact to get the word out. Our business is communication, not locking doors. So while we assumed there would be some in Congress or parts of the U.S. who would be very unhappy with our attempts to try to find ways to communicate with the Chinese, I think most people would agree that this was an important thing to do. We had to maintain ties with those who were our friends in China, those who were most inclined to understand and possibly sympathize with our point of view. We had to sustain that kind of contact discretely, always with the awareness that we could not place any of these contacts in jeopardy with the authorities.

More dangerous than our problem with Congress was their problem with their own ideologues. So someone who was a professor and interested in American studies would have to be very circumspect in his contact with us and we had to be circumspect in our attempts to maintain contact. So that was an important constraint on our ability to act. What we always had to keep in mind was not only how much this would affect our political relationships at home, but, more importantly, how our actions would affect that person's relationships with his or her own leadership in Beijing or other parts of China. It was hard, because for a time right after Tiananmen, there was virtually no contact. At work, we kept the lights on and tried the best we could but, in fact, were rebuffed on most occasions.

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When I first arrived in China, one of the first things I did, like any Foreign Service Officer going abroad, was to make a round of “courtesy” calls. You go in and say “Hi, I am so-and-so and am here to do such-and-such. Glad to meet you” and then go home. With my books under my arms for presentations, I went around to the branch posts and made these calls on as many Chinese officials as I could cram into schedules of several days in each city. My visits also gave the Branch Public Affairs Officers a reason to call their contacts and say that there was a visiting fireman in town from Beijing and he would like to bring him around for a “courtesy” call. This would give the BPAO a chance for a new or repeat contact which he or she otherwise would not have. My presence was a commodity to be marketed.

One particular incident occurred was when I visited Shenyang and our branch office there.

Q: Shenyang is where?

YATES: It is in the north eastern part of China, up near North Korea.

Q: Is that the old Daren?

YATES: No, Daren is a port down on the coast. It is the old Mukden. It was a Chinese rail head and became an industrial center during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. It is a dirty, tough town. It is an industrial city and pollution is extremely high. There are Mexico City-levels of pollution there. I understand that it hasn't changed much in the years since I left. I just spoke with someone recently who had just came back and said it is as bad as ever. This was a person who had bronchial troubles while there, the air was so bad. Just breathing was a definite health hazard, particularly to our people who are there for a long term. There is also a morale problem.

I had to go up there relatively often, because the Branch Public Affairs Officer is one of a small number of the official American community and the sole representative of USIS. Shenyang has only a very small consulate and a connected apartment building. Living is

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not terribly luxurious. One of the difficulties is that food supplies are limited and you have to get a lot of what you need from Beijing. Particularly before we arrived there, China was famous for its limited supplies of food, especially in the winter when most fresh vegetables disappeared. People in Beijing frequently ran out of things, let alone people who lived in Shenyang. So, traditionally, it was a tough place to work.

I made a visit there and saw the local provincial head of the Waiban, the person with responsibility for all international contacts, including, of course, Americans. The visit with him was typical of the visits that I had all around the country. I remember this one because it was so graphic. I drove up with the Branch PAO to the front of the provincial capital and went into his office which was on the second floor. It was a nice office, large with upgraded furniture. He was a fairly high ranking person. After greetings, we sat down and one of his assistants was called in with a notepad and sat in the corner off to our side. He began taking notes of our conversation. The provincial chief really laid me out about the Voice of America which he termed was an affront to the Chinese people. It had insulted the feelings of the Chinese people by aiding and abetting the Tiananmen protesters. It was an incident that was an embarrassment to everybody, etc. He went on and on and on. It was a very well rehearsed speech that I had heard in other places. He went on with his diatribe on the Voice of America, the inequities of the American government and how it has done such terrible things in history, for six or seven minutes. It was quite a show.

Then the note taker closed his pad and put his pencil down, and then we got down to business. We then spoke about why I was there and he was very personable. He asked me where I was from, what was my experience, how he would like to get to know me, and other pleasantries common to such occasions. At that time, I presented him with the books which he accepted with a big smile. It was quite a stack of books. There were a number of books on the U.S. in Chinese and a boxed set of three books on the US. They were paperbacks but collected in a nicely framed box. We went through the pleasantries and

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promises of cooperation and help. I noticed that the note taker wasn't taking any more notes. He was just sitting there, listening and smiling and being very pleasant.

After about 15 - 20 minutes of that, he cleared his throat, the note taker opened his book, and I got another blast on the earlier subjects. I sat and listened. It is hard when you are being roasted as if you were in court being charged with heinous crimes. Anyway, the Branch PAO and I sat through another five minutes or so of the diatribe while the note taker recorded every thought. When the Waiban finally ran out of steam, that was the end of the meeting. We shook hands amiably and were escorted out of the office and down the hall, with the BPAO and me in the lead as customary. As we proceeded down the hall, I turned around to say goodbye as we approached the stairs and observed the note taker and my new friend, the Waiban, had the gift books opened and were absorbed in animated conversation with big smiles. Their attention was so intense that I had no opportunity to offer preliminary goodbyes, so just turned and walked down the stairs.

To me, that was an illustration of what you have to be careful about in judging Chinese rhetoric. If you listen too carefully to the argument, you get a distorted view of what is going on. In this visit, the Waiban was really happy that we came. He was overjoyed with the books because they are hard to get. He was pleased with them and saw some value in them, because he carried them under his arm. He followed me down to the car outside, the note taker had long before stopped taking notes and was all smiles. With warm handshakes, we said goodbye beside the car. It was a very personable and valuable visit. However, if we had argued with him or taken offense at what he said, we would have gotten nowhere, and the visit would have been a disaster. I had learned that lesson the hard way in previous conversations with Chinese officials. We now had his cooperation and pledges of help in getting our visiting speakers into the city, placing our Fulbrighters and speakers at the university, and making sure we had the right contacts for the book program with publishers who would be able to take our materials. All of these were things we wanted to get out of the visit.

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(Waiban or Waiban?)*

We met our objectives by simply closing our ears and minds during the time of the note taking. He had to record his speeches in those notes so that they could be reported back to his own hierarchy in the political system. They said, "Look, this is what I told those nefarious Americans." He had the notes to demonstrate his resolve and support for the strident policy and the note taker to confirm what was said. Everything was fine. On the other hand, he also was able to do his business and get what he really wanted. He wanted a Sister City relationship between an American city and Shenyang. We promised and later made every effort to locate a city willing for the tie up. Ultimately, we were not successful, but the demonstrable effort was there. There is a glut of these formal relationships and American cities are reluctant to step off into new ones. The Waiban's motives were, of course, his desire for commercial connections with the US. For that, he was very affable. Those notes, I am fairly confident, were not part of the official record. If you gave them space to do what they had to do, you could come up with very workable and very positive relationships with the Chinese, even the seemingly intractable ones.

Some of the more affable Chinese, the most warm, the ones who would put their arm around you, were the ones to be most wary of. They often were the strongest ideologues. A sort of reverse radish; white on the outside but very red on the inside. They were often the very ones who had been trained as handlers of foreigners, especially Americans. Naturally, not all enthusiastically friendly Chinese were like that, but one had to choose friends carefully.

Another vignette. On one occasion I visited "Diaoyutai," the official residence of the leadership in Beijing. It is located immediately to the west of the Forbidden City. It is a beautiful compound. My wife and I were seated for most of the dinner next to one of those Western handlers. As is the custom in many Chinese official banquets, we were drinking mao-tai, a strong-flavored Chinese drink that is highly alcoholic. It is not bad if you are eating heavy or greasy Chinese food, but it can get to you pretty fast. The Chinese officials

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attending, like most Chinese government workers, were not rich, so these banquets for foreign dignitaries were wonderful times to eat a lot and absorb as much as they can of the strong drink. This bureaucrat kept pouring down the mao-tai, and it was fascinating to watch the metamorphosis, the butterfly turned into caterpillar. As the evening wore on, he became stripped of his inhibitions about talking about his beliefs and turned into a real communist very quickly.

This was one of the nicest, warmest, most affable and most understanding and Western type Chinese we had ever had contact with in Beijing. But underneath a lot of that was the other side of the Chinese, a real dyed-in-the-wool ideologue. There was no point in arguing with him, because his opinions were rooted as religious commitment to his interpretation of politics. You had to be careful. Those who looked like ideologues often turned out not to be, and those who didn't look like ideologues very often turned into the worse kind. You had to be selective in what kind of relationships you had with people, because you could set yourself up for things as well.

Q: Let's stop at this point. I will put a few things here so we will know where we start next time. We have talked about your arrival, your book program, the problems in Shanghai, the fact that you had to deal with a deep freeze situation, but you could get through to some people if you were willing to listen to an ideological prelude before you got down to business. A couple of things I would like to ask in the 1989-92 period. Were you seeing any impact or monitoring what the Voice of America was doing? Was it having any impact in China, good, bad, or indifferent? Also your impression of American, but other correspondents, who were in China during this time of immediate post-Tiananmen. Also about the ambassador and your impression of the embassy. Do you have anything you would like to put in?

YATES: It will probably emerge. We haven't talked much about Beijing and the conditions while I was there. We haven't talked much about Chengdu, which was another one of our branches or, for that matter, Shenyang. Each of them presented a separate problem that

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confronted me there. Other things in Beijing that deserve mention would be our attempts to make some breakthroughs in terms of communicating with the Chinese, not face to face, but electronically. And some of the telecommunication problems we had within the country itself. Something about life style in the country, the diplomatic community at that time. The main thing I think we should discuss is the state of the exchange program, one of our major efforts in China, and secondarily the Fulbright program.

Q: This is May 15, 1997. Ken, maybe we ought to start with Beijing and life there, the diplomatic life style and what you observed there.

YATES: When I arrived in 1989, Beijing was a city under internal siege. Security forces still held much of the city in strict control. Traffic was difficult mainly because of bicycles. During the commuter hours, the city was a sea of bicycles. There were separate channels on major roads for bicycles only, so there would be an island in the road for the vehicular traffic and a rather wide bicycle paths on both sides. That helped a lot in channeling them, but when the two clashed at intersections, there were a lot of problems, and the bicycles clogged up traffic quite a bit.

It was a pretty quiet city, dusty and very badly polluted. At both ends were large power generating facilities and much of the heavy industry was located to the west. This meant that every time the breeze blew from the west, the prevailing wind, it brought all the soot and pollutants right over the city. To keep a house clean was a major problem, because with the windows open, there was always dust and black soot drifting in. So Beijing at that time was not a very healthy place.

Food in Beijing, despite much ado about Chinese cooking, was not very good. You could go out to restaurants to eat, but sanitary conditions were not the best. The quality of the foodstuffs, themselves, was not very high. If you depended on the local market for edibles, you were in trouble. There were private markets where you could shop, but selection was not always extensive and who knew what made the greens grow. If you knew enough

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about the city, could get around a little bit, and had some Chinese, you could shop in those markets and do all right. At least in the private markets, you could pick the goods out yourself and take them home to cook. But that took a lot of time and is a lot of work. As in most traditional Asian societies, the wife of a family starts early in the morning to prepare the day's meals and works all day long on them. Unlike dropping down to the Safeway here, you didn't go down the street and pick up a few things on your way home from work for dinner. You had to really work at it and prepare it in advance. You bought live, un-plucked chickens and things like that. But even in the early '90s, things were getting better very quickly for the Chinese, as well as for the expatriate community.

Prior to the late '80s and before Deng Xiaoping instituted the reforms which led to the opening up of the peasant market, just about all of the markets were collectivized. All of the produce was handled by the government, and people in Beijing were reduced to little more than cabbage and tea in the winter. There was rice, but it was not always plentiful; cabbage always was.

So that meant that things were better by the time we arrived. The meat was better, but you had to be careful when you bought it on the open market. Many of the foreign community would shop at what were called "Friendship Stores" which were run by the Chinese government for hard currency. So if you had green dollars, you could go in and buy international brands of things like frozen meat, sodas, booze, and some goods like suitcases which came out of Hong Kong. The standard of living was not terrible, but it certainly was Spartan.

Yet, things were changing awfully fast. Major hotels in town were sprouting up like weeds all over the place. They were international class hotels and they had pretty good restaurants. They were outstanding when compared to the standard (and for the most part very much cheaper) fare you had available downtown. There were a number of famous restaurants in Beijing. For example, the Beijing Duck restaurant, which I did not like. The duck was greasy and greasy duck in one week was enough to last for a couple more

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weeks. As residents, we did not go there very often. Those were “banquet” restaurants, aiming at formal dinners and the tourist market. There were some Korean restaurants in town, a couple of which we liked. Others were not very good and had to settle for the quality of ingredients similar to that one could get on the open market. So it was kind of a hit or miss situation on food.

Entertainment was limited. Chinese television did not have anywhere near the selection you have these days on American television. For news, you could listen to the Voice of America which most people did in the mornings, or BBC or Radio Australia. Chinese television programs tended to be pretty stale and not very interesting. It was interesting to watch CCTV dramas occasionally to get a glimpse of Chinese life, but as a standard diet, they soon paled.

Travel was fascinating if you had the time and patience. The problem was, China is an enormous country, the size of the U.S. end to end. Near Beijing, there were the Western Hills on the outskirts and the Summer Palace and various reasonably close sights such as the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs. Once you have seen the Great Wall, however, there is no reason to go back there. There are a lot of old wives' tales from travelers which were always fun to talk about. The Great Wall is not a Great Wall after all. It is a lot of pieces of little walls all over the northern part of China. That image of a single wall was hard to get people to let go of.

We had an incident, for example, of a well known woman runner from the U.S. who came out to China to “run” the Great Wall from one end to the other. She was all equipped with special gear and obviously had made a lot of preparations. We had to gently but persuasively convince her that there was no such thing as “the” Great Wall. She would not be able to start on one end and make it through to the other in one long trot. Since they were scattered all over the area and many were in various stages of disrepair and some were long gone, her mission was truly impossible.

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There are common myths about the Great Wall. For example, it was said that the Great Wall was the only man-made object the astronauts could see from the moon. Despite that claim appearing in more than several official tourist brochures, it is completely false. The wall is not very tall in many places. It is impressive, but only about 4 stories tall. You couldn't see a four story building from the moon, so you didn't have much of a chance to see the Great Wall either. You can't see it from the moon, not even with good equipment. But, nevertheless, the Chinese were very proud of saying that.

Despite the misconceptions, China was a feast for a tourist. Many parts of China were worth visiting. Shanghai, of course, was interesting just because of the importance of the city in antiquity and as the most cosmopolitan of the mainland urban areas. Chengdu, which is in the center of the country in Szechwan province, was the old western capital of China and at the terminus of the silk road; the eastern most point, it is a fascinating place with outstanding food. It takes a very long weekend to get there, do something and get back to Beijing.

As time went on, things got steadily, and in some places rapidly, better. That was true also for the multiplying hotel restaurants in the franchised establishments often invested in by various Chinese official organizations, including the military and the police. There was an Indian restaurant that appeared at a Holiday Inn on the western side of Beijing and was a delightful place to eat. It had pretty good control of the quality of the food which I think was imported through the hotel.

I drive an older BMW. When I took the car to China, I was told I was out of my mind. Firstly, I would not get any parts, and secondly, it wouldn't run on the available gasoline which, of course, was leaded. There were going to be all kinds of problems. In reality, I had no problems. I discovered a semblance of a dealership in Beijing which was in the process of becoming established and was managed by an expatriate Yugoslav. By the

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same measure, all of these old tales I tell you of life in Beijing are certainly now outmoded by far, because things are changing so rapidly.

As the hotels developed in their sophistication, they also started bringing in foreign amenities like supermarkets. Beijing was growing in commercial importance and therefore attracted a much larger number of international folk, all of whom needed some sort of support like what they were accustomed to at home. They also were willing to pay a premium for it. There was the Watson group out of Hong Kong, which moved in to take advantage of the new and rapidly growing market. You could go into their market in the arcade of one of the major hotels and be surprised at what looked like a real supermarket, with rows and rows of canned goods and frozen Australian beef. The meat was pretty dry, but nonetheless, it was a great leap forward compared to what was available for the expatriate community.

Housing was lousy in Beijing but much better than it had been. Everything depends on the development of the country. Previously, people who worked at the American Embassy had to live in hotels. That was the first stage. Then the Chinese put together an expatriate community not far from the American Embassy where many people lived. But that was run down. The Chinese tended to build buildings that looked and operated as if they were ten years old when they opened. This owed much to the indifferent construction. Cement, I guess, was thin, elevators would not work reliably, and painting was mainly whitewash and not the kind of durable stuff that we are accustomed to. This meant every time someone walked down the hall and bumped into the wall, there was a mark. It didn't take very long, given the situation there, to turn a new building into a slum. It was a difficult place to live in.

We moved into a brand new apartment when we arrived, and we felt very fortunate. When the embassy put the carpet in, it looked fine. The problem was, it had been stored somewhere uncontrolled for a couple of years and was infested with brown moths. Thousands of them. Every night, these things would come out and swarm on the walls. When I took my problem to the General Services Office, they said it couldn't be anything

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they had done and must be coming from outside. "How were our screens?" Of course, there was nothing wrong with the screens; the problem lay under the carpet. The padding underneath was infested. Ultimately, we had to rip up the entire carpet and replace the padding, which is difficult after you have moved into a wall-to-wall carpeted apartment. Even today, from some of our goods that were packed in Beijing and not opened until we got back to Washington, I swear I can recognize some of those brown moths emerging.

Those were the living conditions we faced in Beijing. Every once in a while, the elevators wouldn't run, and if you lived on the ninth floor as we did, you had a major problem. It was okay if you were home when they stopped, but if you were outside coming in, you were in trouble. Luckily, each building had two elevators and if the one for your side of the building was out, you had to take the one on the other side. When you got to your floor, you had to take a sort of catwalk on the outside of the building across to your side of the building. That was unnerving if you suffered from even mild vertigo and it was a windy day. We would have to walk outside of the ninth floor level to get to our side of the building.

Also, in the part of town where we lived, the new Australian Embassy was being built. In Beijing, with good reason, they kept all trucks off the streets during the day. Trucks could only run at night. That meant that the noise on the streets was highest in the evening when trucks were running back and forth delivering gravel and cement. You had the beep-beep-beep noise that goes on when trucks back up, and this went on all night from about 11:00 to 4:00 in the morning. All this was accompanied by the intermittent crash of gravel being dumped on the ground, so it didn't make for a very pleasant existence.

Another little quirk in the Chinese system usually occurred in June when they would turn off the hot water. The philosophy was that you don't need hot water because it was June. It was warm. This was probably true, but you want to take a shower and cold showers are just about as cold in June as they are in December. That meant no hot water for anything in the apartments. Some embassies rented hotel rooms so people could take a towel, a bar of soap, and go down to the hotel and use the shower at least a couple of times a

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week. So this was not gracious living in the sense I am sure members of Congress would see life in the Foreign Service. It was not easy in a whole variety of ways. For example, you could not drink the water, which meant you had to drink bottled water. You could either take what the embassy provided or use the tablets they gave you and make your own. In the more remote parts of China where the embassy didn't have a supply of bottled water, they had distillers. Each embassy apartment was provided with one, so you could distill your own water. If you have ever had to drink distilled water, you know it does not taste very good. Once you distill the water, you have to aerate it and in aerating it, of course, you then introduce the possibility of more of introducing those things that you were distilling out. Anyway, it was not easy.

We had a resident doctor in Beijing for the many ills and problems that were likely to occur. A psychiatrist visited from time to time to try to soothe the pressures from the day-to-day existence. Security remained a worry for many people. The wife of the Public Affairs Officer was threatened with a knife in the market one day. There were then, and I am sure there still are today, people in China who don't like foreigners and essentially insist that you leave one way or another. That made life nerve wracking, especially for wives who were not working and who had to make other things interesting for themselves like shopping or moving around the city. That was hard and sometimes dangerous. There were a couple of knifings while we were there. Mostly teenagers who would get into trouble. For children, there was not much to do, and this meant additional pressures on families. We didn't have kids, so it wasn't much of a problem for us, but those who had them found there were a lot of things they did not have for their children that they wished they had.

But life was still interesting, because you could move around China and learn much. You could go to some place that was old and different. Because you could exhaust the major sights in Beijing rather quickly, you probably did not go back very often. How many times would you want to go through the Forbidden City, for example? It is interesting, and every time you go there, you find something different, but it pretty much stays the same. There were museums that would change their exhibits now and then. But in many

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ways, it certainly was not a world class exhibition city. So you found your interests where you could. People who worked, of course, found it in the work, which was remarkably interesting because of the constant challenges at that time. But for the diplomatic community, it was like a ghetto. You lived with other diplomats from all over the world.

There was not an American ghetto or African ghetto, it was all mixed up. But that meant you probably had people living next to you who had kids who didn't have any money. That was particularly true for the diplomats from the smaller nations in Africa or the third world countries that Beijing had cultivated for so many years who had no salaries to speak of and had to innovate to get along. The Chinese had simply given them space for embassies to maintain those relations. So they were living check-by-jowl with people who were relatively rich and that led to temptations. In one of the compounds, there was something that could loosely be termed as gangs comprised of the youth of some third world countries. I guess you could say that most of the danger from theft or burglary probably was from other foreigners. If something happened, the Chinese police would say it was a foreign problem and had nothing to do with them. We didn't get much help.

In the residential areas, the security was not pervasive. You had privacy, but there was a strong probability that all the apartments were bugged. We were on the ninth floor, the top inhabited floor. Above us was a very large area where the heating pipes and elevator machinery was located in the center of the roof and on the two sides was a flat area of roof. You could get up there, but there were parts of that section that were locked up and there were Chinese employees, rather intelligent looking people, running up and down the stairs there often, so that was probably where the listening devices for the buildings were located, in those locked rooms next to the elevator machinery. In the summer when it got hot, they would open the doors and you could see people going and coming, although some of them had air conditioners, which was very rare in China. I guess if you are one of that kind of person, you tend to get what you want.

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I had an incident driving home one warm afternoon. As is my habit in warm weather, I had my arm out the window and was driving beside the construction site of the Australian Embassy. A bicyclist rode up beside me, grabbed a hold of the car and threw something into the car and then rode off. He then stopped his bike and turned around and looked back at me. I stopped, got out of the car and chewed him out for endangering himself and my control of the car. Without a word he turned, got on his bicycle and left. I found out later that what he had tossed into the car was a folded up piece of paper saying, "I want to meet you." It gave a place and a time. He was fairly well dressed. Clearly not a student. He looked to be in his early to middle twenties. He had a white shirt on and looked like a bureaucrat. Of course, you never know what complex things you encounter. Entrapment was a common danger. People are approached by all kinds of things. I threw the paper away in the parking lot and then reported it to the security people for a couple of reasons.

If I kept the paper, I was subject to being picked up for possibly aiding and abetting somebody and, if this was a setup, putting myself in jeopardy by walking around with that piece of paper in my pocket. If they found the piece of paper, there was no incriminating evidence on it for anybody, so I didn't feel I might be putting somebody in danger. I suspected that, given the nature of the person and the place of the incident, it was a setup planned for some reason by the security forces. All took place not far from one of the security huts that surrounded the foreigners compound. The location was in full view of that post. There were plenty of other places around town where somebody could have left the paper without being in view of a security post. So to me he was either very inept, and somebody I wouldn't want to have anything to do with anyway. Just why he had stopped his bicycle after tossing in the note was a mystery. If he had been a dissident, he should have kept going out of fear of being discovered by the security person at the compound. Another question was why, after I had stopped and yelled at the bicyclist, no security guard approach or inquired what the problem was. Of course, if it was a setup by a security group they would have stayed away, not wanting to interfere in that operation.

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Just why he stopped I will never know. I never heard anything more about it from security. Those are the kinds of things you were subjected to.

In the back of our compound at USIS, we had the residence of the Ambassador and the embassy's Health Unit. That compound once served as the entire liaison office and so had several support buildings that were used to support the much smaller staff of the time. It was in the health unit that Dr. Fang Li Zhi, the very famous astrophysicist dissident was in "hiding." Of course, the Chinese knew exactly where he was and likely had the place zeroed in with all types of detection devices. Every day I had to go to work in my office not more than 20 yards from where Dr. Fang and his wife resided. He had come to the residence during the period of Tiananmen, and since diplomat compounds are legally the territory of the resident embassy, the Chinese were not allowed to enter. If they wished to, they could have walked in at any time, using only a small amount of force; there is no real protection, only diplomatic convention.

So we had super special Chinese surveillance around the compound. Across from the sole gate to the compound sat a Mercedes Benz with four security personnel at all times. They consisted of a driver, one female security agent, one apparent supervisor, a male, and one who was obviously a simple muscle man. We also had a Chinese security motorcyclist who always hung out with them. They would play cards in the car with all the doors open. They were bored stiff. I actually felt sorry for them. I would often drive my car into the compound on weekends to wash it with the hose on the shady side of the building. Of course, it was close to the building and not within easy sight of the security people monitoring the building. I would drive in, possibly do some work in the office, and then go out and wash the car. On leaving the compound, I would be followed every time by both the Mercedes and the motorcycle because they were suspicious that I might be spiriting away Dr. Fang, his wife, or both. Of course, another Mercedes would take the place of the one following me from the compound.

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I was followed no matter where I went, shopping, picking my wife up for lunch at a hotel somewhere, etc. When we would get out of the car, lock it, and walk away, one of the security people would approach it to check out the back seat for anything suspicious. Often, one would stand on the rear bumper and jump up and down to see whether or not something heavy was in the trunk. They were always careful not to damage anything and never tried to break in, but they sure made a mess of my rear bumper.

Sometimes, I was very happy to have them escorting me, because in Beijing traffic, you are always subject to getting into an accident from a bicyclist who rides right in front of you without any chance for me to stop. If you hit the person, possibly causing injury, maiming or death, the consequences can be very difficult. Crowds gather quickly at any accident, and the foreigner is always considered guilty. The courts always seem to find that guilt goes with the ability to pay. People at the embassy had those kinds of incidents too frequently during the time I was in Beijing. If you do, you have real trouble that may lead to your being forced to leave the country or even physical injury from the crowds that can easily be stirred up.

Anyway, having the security car right on my tail meant I probably would have had plenty of witnesses if I had gotten into any kind of problem. Because the security car carried no license tags, it was easily spotted for what it was by the normal Beijing citizen. No one would want to tangle with the security division, so that alone might have dissuaded those curious that would otherwise run to check out an accident. In a way, the following chase car was a strange comfort.

I was talking about the problem of security forces following me in Beijing. This practice led to a variety of interesting circumstances. Traffic was always heavy and crowded. If you pull up to a traffic light just as it was changing yellow, the light would turn red before you could get completely through the intersection. Usually the cross traffic would begin to jump the light as it turned yellow, so a chase car, if it was several lengths behind would possibly get caught by the cross traffic. This would mean the chase car driver would either lose

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you or be forced to do something dangerous like forcing his way through the light. Most of the time, they did just that. However, in certain circumstances such as a blocking bus, the car would be caught. That would show the function of the motorcycle, which would also be a part of the cavalcade. If the car got caught in traffic, the motorcyclist could then take over and follow the car until the Mercedes could catch up again. He would travel down sidewalks to make sure you were not lost. The possible loss of Fang Li Zhi was that serious an issue to them.

After a while, you began to know these people, because they were the same people all the time. If the light looked as if it was going to change, I made it a habit to slow down to make sure I didn't get through the intersection in time. After a while, the driver of the chase car began, I think, to understand what I was doing. I never had any problems with chase cars. Knowing I would not cause them trouble, they would not tailgate, and although they had to follow me, they were always polite and never abused their authority. I never had any difficulties.

Some others who got their kicks from losing the chase cars did have trouble. We had one younger officer who had a pickup truck, one with a camper body on the back. It was easily identified. He had good Chinese and traveled all over Beijing. He knew some of the dissidents. Like the rest of us, he was routinely followed by the security forces. Unfortunately, he saw it as a game. He would cut down some hutong, which is an alley in Beijing, and make a quick turn down another one. He knew his way around Beijing and sometimes could lose the security car. He did so on several occasions which he thought was a terrific experience and some kind of minor victory. Yet it was a pyrrhic one, for he found one morning that all four tires were slashed flat. The Chinese security forces came over and looked and said, "Gee, this is terrible. Must be one of these foreign kids, a Chinese kid wouldn't do that." That probably was true, a Chinese kid didn't do it. I think it was a pretty obvious warning that if you are going to fool with the security forces, you are not going to be driving. So take your choice, either no tires or the security people. So

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I think he learned his lesson at that point. This was their country, and if they wanted to do something, they would. You buck them at your own peril.

That is a little glimpse of life in Beijing. There wasn't much social life, of course, although there were diplomatic parties all the time where people got together for conversation, trading of stories, and something to drink. They were not very elaborate, and Beijing was not a place where there was a very heavy social world. If you wanted to go to parties, you could, because most embassies would have national days. With all the countries represented in the Chinese capital, there was almost always someone's national day you could go to. But it was the same crowd all of the time and not very interesting. You got sore feet, didn't get fed very well, and if you did not drink, it was not much fun. I did not drink much, so I did not find much interesting unless there were contacts you could meet there.

If there were Chinese officials invited, it was worth going to receptions just to make contact, because you couldn't go to their offices very often. One of the problems of working in Beijing, particularly right after Tiananmen, was that all Chinese contacts shut down. You couldn't get through to anybody. The most frustrating thing was, you were supposed to be a Foreign Service Officer contacting people of the country, and you couldn't do that unless you got outside of Beijing. That is why my trips to the USIS branches were always so important.

Q: Who was the ambassador and how did he operate?

YATES: When I arrived, Jim Lilley was the ambassador. He had come in from Korea. He was actually born in China and, I think, had a very strong personal identification with the country. He was nice, smart, capable, and well liked in the embassy. He was a little stiff sometimes but nevertheless a warm human person. Yet despite his personality and early ties with China, he had a hard time. More than any other person in the embassy, the ambassador is the one who does the contacting or hobnobbing with officials. He could

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not get to see anybody. Even the mayor of Beijing was not available to him for a long, long time. In fact, the first breakthrough with Mayor Chen Chi Tong was something that I became involved in.

As Deputy Public Affairs Officer, I inherited many of the invitations that were passed to the Public Affairs Officer but which he did not want to attend. The embassy sent over an invitation it had received for a reception in connection with the publishing of a book, an event that was not a very exciting opportunity for most. The book was a Chinese encyclopedia commemorating the Olympics of 2000. This was the beginning of the Chinese campaign to be selected for the 2000 Olympics. It was essentially a travel book about China and Chinese things. Of course no one wanted to go, so it was passed along to me, the book guy. I was reluctant but decided to go, since we didn't get many invitations and somebody should represent the United States.

As expected, it was a very dry ceremony in a big room with a lot of people, mostly Chinese. I was seated in the front middle, as befitting a representative of the US, but I was a bit uncomfortable since it was expected to be an unfortunately long ceremony with lots of speeches. On one side, I had a Yugoslav representative who didn't speak any English and I spoke no Serbo-Croatian, so I ignored her. On the other side of me was seated an older lady, whom I took to be the mother of a writer or somebody like that. We struck up a simple conversation in Chinese; she spoke no English. We talked about all the inane things you talk about at a gathering like that. Isn't this nice and what the book was about, etc. Out of the blue, she asked me at one point if I thought the ambassador would like to meet the mayor? I was a bit taken aback. Strange things routinely happened in China, but this was in a league of its own. I knew the ambassador had long wished to pay a call on the mayor but had been rebuffed by the hard-nosed Communist. Mayor Chen Chi Tong was implicated in the middle of events that took place at Tiananmen, but as leader of the capital city was an important, "must meet" for the ambassador.

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The ceremony was beginning, and people were making speeches, shouting into the microphones, and walking around the room with flowers, making presentations. I responded, "Why, of course. Why do you ask?" She replied, "Well, if you think the ambassador would be interested in meeting the mayor (who was later removed from office because of corruption), I think I can arrange it. Give me a call when you get back to your office." I said, "Fine, I will do that." Then, for the first time, she gave me her card. She was Beijing's Waiban. As I noted before, the Waiban were responsible for handling foreign affairs within their jurisdiction. Every major governmental area has a Waiban and she was the one for Beijing. Evidently she was a Russian translator years ago, used by Mao Zedong in his contacts with Soviets. Madame Gan was in her early-sixties when I met her, and evidently had been given the post as a reward for her good service to the late chairman.

When I got back to USIS, I called the ambassador's office and asked what they wished me to do. They asked me to follow up. So I called Madame Gan back and asked what she had in mind. I was still a bit dubious since my Chinese never was stellar, and there was small worry that I might have gotten the wrong impression. I inquired about what exactly she had in mind. She simply asked, "When would the ambassador be available?" I said, "Name your day." He had never even shaken the hand of the mayor of Beijing and would find a way to make time at the mayor's convenience. Finally, we worked out to go to one of the older world class hotels in Beijing for lunch. It was to be a small group, just the mayor, the Ambassador, several aides, Madam Gan, and myself. It turned out to be all very pleasant. We sat and talked about not much, but there was contact, and that was the formal opening of contact with the city of Beijing.

We always had a lot of administrative problems with the city and having direct contact with the mayor would be very helpful. In China, "guanshi" or "connections" made all the difference. Politically, the mayor was a very important man in the party in Beijing, a senior elder in the communist party in China, and somebody who the embassy should be in

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contact with. If we didn't like him, we could still be in touch with him because he had power.

The Chinese, themselves, did not have a very good mechanism to talk to us, never mind us with them. It worked both ways. It took that kind of a low level contact to get the ball rolling, but once it did, the Chinese were very forthcoming. This was the kind of thing the ambassador was faced with as head of the American mission. He had very limited contacts with the foreign ministry. When you went into the foreign ministry as an embassy delegation, you always were led to the same room, not someone's office. It was always the same reception room where you sat in the same old chairs. You were served tea, they came in and presented their position, and you presented your position. The meeting ended with their thanks for your coming. "It was nice seeing you," they would say as they helped you out the door to your cars. It was a very formalized, not very productive relationship.

After Tiananmen in 1989, that was the way it was for a better part of a year. However, it gradually changed. One of the interesting stories that came up, was on how this change started. We always had steel helmeted, automatic weaponry equipped, tall security guards stationed every 18 - 20 feet around the compound. This was to intimidate us and to intimidate the people of Beijing from coming through our gates to see us. Former President Nixon came to China on a goodwill visit. This was long after his presidency; he was doing something for Pepsi Cola. He came to China to see Deng Xiaoping, because Nixon opened American relations with China and the Chinese never forgot. They see Nixon as something of a demi-god. They didn't understand the business of Watergate, but they did understand that Nixon was the first to make the breakthrough to China, opening China up to the rest of the world.

So Nixon came back to China. While in Beijing, Nixon was to come to the embassy to meet with employees on the occasion of the July 4th celebration. As the conversation with Deng Xiao Ping was later related, Nixon said, "I am going to go to the American Embassy later this afternoon to say hello to all the people who work there. I understand there are

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security guards all around the embassy with automatic weapons and steel helmets. That looks awful. When I go there, I don't want to see those guards." Miraculously, no more than twenty minutes after those words had tumbled out of his mouth, those guards disappeared and never came back. At least not during the time I was there, and as far as I know, never did. They just disappeared. In their place were apple cheeked, young farm boys, obviously out of the far provinces such as Gansu. They obviously did not know much about the big city. They had little side arms, sloppy uniforms and stood around, embarrassed at having nothing to do. When Nixon came to the embassy that afternoon, there were no steel helmeted, automatic-weapon-equipped guns around. Evidently, Deng Xiaoping simply told the security forces to knock it off. That was all it took.

In addition to the motorized security forces at our USIS compound, the Chinese also had every intersection in the diplomatic quarter equipped with television cameras. Ostensibly, they were for traffic control, so that the traffic engineers could keep control over where the traffic was and how things were working, but, in fact, they were observation cameras pointed at us. So they kept up their observations and the chase cars, but the threatening posture of the security forces diminished greatly after the Nixon visit.

Q: You talked about a number of the posts. Shanghai, Canton and Mukden. There were others weren't there?

YATES: The former Mukden is now called Shenyang, the capital of the northeastern part of China. Shenyang is a rail head and a major center for heavy industry in China. Because of its role as a center of industrial activity, it is heavily polluted. Also, because many of the heavy industries in China were the last on the list for privatization, they are the ones closest to or actually in bankruptcy. That leaves the economy of Shenyang a bit weak. Weaker still is the remarkable city of Changchun just to the north of Shenyang. It is an agricultural city, a poor city. It is one of the few places in eastern China where you can see beggars on the street and people in rags. But the city is magnificent. The boulevards are wide and all the major buildings that the Japanese built are magnificent. They intended it

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to be a major capital. It is a beautiful city, but, of course, it is no longer used for that. I had a chance to visit once and shall never forget it.

Q: Where were our consulates?

YATES: In Shenyang, Chengdu, which is out in Szechwan province - the capital of the west - Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Q: Was Chengdu where you were having some problems?

YATES: We had a problem out there, because the facilities were no good. However, Chengdu was extremely important as a major cultural and political center in China. In terms of population, the Chengdu consular district included as many people as the whole of the U.S. The consulate was on one floor and USIS was on another floor of a major hotel in the center of the city, but visitors to either had to enter through a separate entrance in the rear so that the Chinese could control who was coming and going. Living quarters were on the third floor. That meant you lived above the store, and it was known, at least, in one case that there were Branch Public Affairs Officers there who hadn't been out of the building in more than four months. There was a restaurant below and a shop where you could buy cereal, fruit, and things like that. If you brought in a lot of meat in a big freezer, and people did, and bought rice, you could go in and close the door and stay there for months.

Psychologically, it was a bad situation for people to live in. It was dirty and dark, with electric power that would go out all the time. In these days of computers and other electronic gadgets that are necessary for the modern office, it was very, very difficult to maintain a reasonable operation in such a situation. So, the Federal Buildings Office in Washington some years before had contracted with the Chinese to build a new consulate on the edge of the city. In fact, they did build the building, but FBO came back to look at it and said it wasn't suitable. It was built to Chinese standards and had no real relevance to

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our needs. Since they had not followed our requests, there was a big hassle. This went on for years.

At the time of the construction, FBO shipped in things like refrigerators, air conditioners, freezers, furniture, and rugs and stored them all. Over a period of about five years, these things began to rust. They hadn't been installed but the building was still sitting there, so after long and difficult negotiations, they got the Chinese to agree to rehab the brand new building and make it into a building that would first meet our needs and secondly would meet our codes for fire, power, plumbing, and other usual standards. In fact they did, but it took us a long time to get in there. There was a great controversy among the staff, because for USIS, operating downtown in the hotel was better. You could get to places quickly to meet people, go to a coffee shop, etc. The new consulate was way out of town. Although it was closer to one of the universities, it was a lot further from the center of the city. So, there were good and bad things and that was a major problem in Chengdu at the time.

Chengdu also had another role. It was the gateway to Tibet. It doesn't look like it on a map, but if you were to fly to Tibet, you had to stop in Chengdu first, stay over night, and then get the plane to Lhasa, if you approached from inside China. So that meant that people who were on their way to Tibet would have to go through Chengdu and that meant that Chengdu provincial authorities had a good deal to say about who went and who did not. If you didn't have permission to go, you could not get on airplanes, get hotel reservations, or move. These things all required clearances. For example, for citizens in China, you couldn't stray more than five miles from the point where you were assigned without getting permission. You had to apply for permission.

There were certain cities in China that were considered open to diplomats and tourists. The consulate cities were open, and you could travel there without advance permission as long as you took public transport, mainly air. You couldn't drive. They knew when you were going to go, because you told them by buying a ticket. For other cities, you had to

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apply for separate permission and justify your plans. They could choose to let you go or restrict your travel. It was the same for their diplomats in the US. We had been able to add to the number of open cities, apart from those with consulates, by negotiation. All aspects of open cities and travel was by reciprocity. If we had a trip that was turned down by the Chinese, then through the reciprocal arrangement, we would turn down a trip the Chinese had requested in the US. Say they wanted to go to Atlanta. We would say no, because the Chinese do not have a consulate there and it may not have been on an otherwise open list. The State Department might grant permission to travel as long as the Chinese would permit us a similar right in China. So if you wanted to go to some place in China that was not an open city and the Chinese said no, then we would deny one of their people here in Washington permission to go to some place that was not an open city. An interesting set of circumstances.

I previously mentioned that I had visited Nanning, a city near the Vietnamese border. That is not an open city. We were going to have a Fulbright conference down there, and in order for me to go to Nanning, I had to apply for permission and had to have it granted by the Chinese. Normally, they did grant such requests, as we did for them here. They wanted to go to Huntsville, Alabama to visit the rocket site there. We could let them go, but that meant we had to go to some place like Nanning. The process was quite complicated. One consular officer made quite a reputation by keeping very, very close tabs on that whole process. Every time any slip occurred at all in China, reciprocal actions were taken in the U.S. with the Chinese. It was a real game, making life a little more difficult for everyone.

Normal travel arrangements were also difficult. If you wanted to travel, you could not simply go to the airline counter and say, "I would like to go to Shenyang" and buy a ticket. All airlines of China were controlled by a single ticket office so as to allow maximum security control. Also, because communications were relatively primitive and because the separate Waiban offices had control over foreigners outside of Beijing, you could not purchase round trip-tickets. If you got a ticket to go to Shenyang, it was confirmed that you

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had a reservation and a seat. To get back home, however, you had to make arrangements for a ticket after you arrived in Shenyang. If there were no seats for your desired flight, a common occurrence, the answer was “no.” You were stuck. And many an American tourist was just that, stuck. Some found their way back on trains which were frequently very long and uncomfortable trips. The airlines were jammed-packed full all the time in China, because of the development that was going on in the country. So it was an interesting experience to travel in a country that presented so many difficulties. Are you interested in more about travel in China?

Q: No, I don't think so. I assume you were monitoring VOA. What were you getting out of VOA?

YATES: There were two problems with VOA in China. First off was the skip problem and getting into the locations intended. The second thing was jamming of the Chinese language VOA broadcasts. They were not jamming English because English was a resource to them as I described earlier. You couldn't receive the Chinese language broadcasts in Beijing due to the jamming. If you went to a particular western part of the city just before you got to the area called the Fragrant Hills which was a range of low mountains that ringed the western part of the city, there was a military compound with very large antennas. We were pretty sure those were at least some of the antennas used for jamming. But the problem with jamming is that it is a lot harder than broadcasting, because it doesn't skip, it is a direct line. A well designed directional antenna will render it useless or filter it out to permit an audible signal. The only way to render the incoming signal inaudible is to make it powerful enough to overcome the incoming signal from any direction.

For reliability's sake, effective jamming transmitters must be located near the city. All jamming is simply broadcasting on the same wavelength as the incoming signal with another so strong it will obliterate an incoming signal, even for directional antennas aimed at a signal coming from a relatively high angle of attack as it rebounds from

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the ionosphere. But that takes a lot of oil and energy. I noted before that shortwave broadcasting is an expensive business. Jamming is more so even at a short range and in a limited area. There were about eight known jammers around Beijing in order to make sure the city was not exposed. Yet it becomes more expensive still. Since each frequency must be jammed by all transmitters to be effective, a broadcaster need only simulcast on several frequencies to penetrate a jammed area or at least significantly raise the cost of the jamming.

A radio wave can often be blocked by buildings, mountains, hills, etc., so an incoming shortwave signal bouncing off the ionosphere would be coming down onto the city from above, but the jammers would be broadcasting horizontally across the city. If a person got behind a building where there was a radio “shadow” and put up a simple antenna, he could hear the VOA Chinese signal that could not be heard in other areas exposed to the jammer. So that meant the jammers had to be arrayed in a ring around Beijing to make sure that signals were not getting through certain sectors and to eliminate any “shadows.” Of course, you could get yourself in a car or get on your donkey and ride out to the remote regions of the city and hear VOA Chinese language broadcasts because the Chinese, themselves, could not afford to jam everywhere all the time.

It was clear that the VOA Chinese language broadcasting was getting through. We knew that, because we would get postcards from people telling us they had heard us on such-and-such and ask a question, enter a contest, or something like that. We were getting mail from China clearly indicating that the Chinese language broadcasts were getting through, but they certainly were a lot more difficult to hear than the English broadcasts. Whenever I would travel, I would take a shortwave radio with me, and in the hotel room or wherever I was staying, I would try during the night to hear both English and Chinese VOA signals. We also paid expatriates to do monitoring for us. That gave feedback to the engineers about what frequencies, what times of day, and what the conditions were when that person was listening. The problem was, many of our monitoring radios were of a

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higher quality than the radios the Chinese, themselves, were using. So it wasn't always a clear guarantee that we were getting through.

Q: Because we played a prominent part in the Tiananmen incident and there were a lot of dissidents who were in the United States during this time, students who felt they couldn't get back and there was a lot of news about people being unhappy with China, were we having to pull our punches at all?

YATES: I don't think so, but there is a fine line between pulling a punch and being careful how you do things not to damage your own interests. The finesse of all that is determining what your own interests are. Obviously a paramount interest we had was to prevent any kind of outbreak of war or conflict in Asia. So you can't poke a stick constantly in somebody's eye and expect him to think well of you. So we had to be a little bit careful about that. In somebody's eyes, that would maybe mean we were pulling punches, because you don't always call foul every time there is a transgression of human rights, for example.

One of the problems we had in China was this question of human rights. It was politically powerful back here in the U.S., and it was politically correct to say the right things about human rights. Few would question the motivation of defending human rights. They should be defended. Obviously, this is a basic tenet in American philosophy, the American way of government, and what we are putting forth abroad. On the other hand, if you want progress on human rights, what is the best way to promote that effort in China? A good argument could be made that the best way to get it would be to work to some degree with the system, itself, to try to improve the conditions. Incrementalism, perhaps, is the best word to use, and it is not always a positive phrase. You get two steps forward, one step back in Chinese policy. I think we made a lot of progress on that score. What it meant, however, was you didn't frontally assault them on the question, because they would freeze up on you.

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China still has an authoritarian government. This is not a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. We have to be careful, so that if we want to make sure that human rights are expanding in China, we may have to take a different set of steps rather than to defend every infraction of human rights as we see them. The question is one of balance but always keeping the objective in sight. Whenever there is a loss of human rights, someone is affected in a very personal way. Can we afford to look away when the offense is committed, even when it may mean that other, future transgressions might be avoided? What are the basic limits on the question of human rights? If someone is held without bail, is that a basic transgression of human rights? Not even in this country is that a basic transgression. It is possible to hold someone without charges, when releasing them might jeopardize others. There are strict limitations on that police power, but it is not a simple, black or white situation. There must be legal process.

The Chinese don't necessarily always observe the law as we would see it. But, again, it has never been so in China. China is not a democracy. They do not have the same law. While there is a seed of democracy in their system, it has never been a democracy. The question is how far must they compromise their own system before we feel comfortable in accepting them for specific relations such as trade. So it becomes a very complicated equation, and I don't think we had all the answers while I was there. But I do think that we were careful. If we went into a place where somebody gave you a hard time, you tended to listen and keep your mouth shut until they were finished or wore themselves out talking and then make your points, if you could. You had to use a certain amount of tact and a certain amount of understanding of where the Chinese were coming from, a certain amount of delicacy to avoid embarrassing the people who have the same goals as you do, but not always the same road map to get there.. That's always a difficult thing to measure.

We had special problems with CODELs, because some of the congressional delegations would come into town with one thought, to expose the human rights violations in China. They would make speeches and do things that were not in our larger national interest.

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I remember a very graphic example of that. Since I was Deputy Public Affairs Officer in Beijing, I would be in charge whenever the Public Affairs Officer was absent. During one of those interregnums, I got a big CODEL in, with four members of Congress and a whole phalanx of others. The delegation was led by Nancy Pelosi, the member of congress who was leading the charge on the question of human rights in China and particularly on granting most-favored-nation status to China. It was a hot potato in Congress then, and to some extent still is. Despite an initial reluctance to grant them visas, the moderates in the government had prevailed over the hard-liners, and the delegation was granted visas. It was clear that some parts of the Chinese bureaucracy did not want that particular delegation to enter, and there was a lot of sensitivity about their presence in Beijing. However, the argument was made that it would be best to allow them to see conditions directly, and they were received with politeness and dignity.

On the last day of their visit, they held a press conference at the USIS center which I arranged for them. They came to the press conference after a surprisingly uneventful visit and said that they had come to China, did not agree with the Chinese, found many areas of disagreement, but at least were talking. They continued that they had completed the trip, and everything was reasonable. They had learned a lot and were returning to Washington. That was all right. We finished the polite and unremarkable press conference, and I took them out to the bus. We had a fairly large group of American and international press, CNN, CBS, etc. On the way out, I asked Representative Pelosi and several other members of the delegation if there was anything else that we could do for them. The answer was, "No, we are very tired. We have been traveling a lot. We are going to go back to the hotel and rest and maybe take a little bit of a walk. Then we are going to get on the airplane and go home. Thank you very much." Everybody shook hands and boarded the bus. I turned on my heels and went back into the building, satisfied that all had been done as required. The bus drove off.

About 20 minutes later I got a call from Mike Chinoy, the CNN correspondent, saying, "I think you ought to know about something that is going on." I said, "What?" He said,

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"You know the delegation didn't go back to the hotel." I said, "Really? Where are they?" "Well, they are in Tiananmen Square, and they have unfurled a banner protesting Chinese human rights. They were all wearing the small white flowers which they had on before and in solidarity with the students are making speeches and carrying on. There may be some trouble." He was worried about his own people, who had gotten out of the square, but he wasn't sure what the repercussions might be. Security forces were moving in on the square at that time.

The whole thing, of course, became a blowup. That addresses the same question you have been asking. This is what you call tactless. Here the Chinese had hosted this group, and they were soiling the nest before they left, so to speak. I am sure that looked great in San Francisco or in Georgia, or in Washington state where they were from. One particular congressman in the group was in a hard fight in a gerrymandered district, and evidently needed the newspaper columns which he was getting, but at what cost? In the aftermath of this, it was going to become very difficult to get people in who really needed to know about what was going on in China, because the Chinese would no longer accept them, out of fear of the same sort of stunt. Those people in the Chinese bureaucracy who had argued to let those people in to start with, now were under a cloud. Their advice had turned out wrong. They had been bitten by the very people who they were assisting in learning about China. Was the statement of support for human rights worth the lost credibility of the embassy and that of the rest of the U.S. diplomatic community had in Beijing? I would argue that it was not.

Q: Yes, it didn't further any particular cause because it only furthered the cause of the United States, you might say.

YATES: It only furthered the cause of several politicians from the United States. I don't think it furthered the cause of the United States. In this case, the cause of the United States was to see an improvement in human rights in China, not to make speeches. This ran counter to that effort. What it did was to make it more difficult to bring in the kinds of

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the people from the U.S. who would make the case for human rights to the Chinese and give them a better understanding of how congress was approaching the problem, what the American people felt about the problem and why it was necessary for them to make changes in the way that they treated their own people. Why this was good and why this was healthy and would benefit them in the long run. That message was lost in the political showmanship of the moment, and that is too bad.

Q: What was your impression of the Western, particularly the American, reporting on China and the correspondent corps at that time?

YATES: Like every group of people, they varied. We had some very, very good people out there who had spent long years in Asia, who knew China and spoke some Chinese but had enormous difficulties in maneuvering around. Mike Chinoy is a good example of that. He had been in town for a long time and could speak Chinese and get around. However, at every turn they were watched and harassed. We had VOA correspondents in Beijing, of course. The Voice of America was thrown out of China for a long time, because the Chinese specifically blamed the VOA for their turmoil in Tiananmen. If they didn't start it, at least they abetted it as it progressed. So the Voice of America was under particular pressure in China. That meant if they were going to cover any stories at all, they had to press all the time for equal treatment with the rest of their colleagues. They had to make a special effort all the time for contacts with China so that they could develop their stories. One of the problems of the U.S. media, and those from other foreign media as well, is that the people whom they spoke with were subject to harassment, pressure, incarceration, or worse because of their contact with the West. The Chinese did not appreciate their own citizens getting in touch with media people, particularly Americans. Many of the media people in China were not Americans; they were Brits, Australians, and others who came to China and were working for American news organizations.

One of the problems with correspondents in China was their editors back home altering a story. The editors were interested in the sensational or striking, but not as deeply

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interested in the why of what was going on. Hot facts were always more of a story than careful analysis. That meant a lot of the deeper coverage of China was lost. I think that is a disservice to the American reader, but that perhaps reflects the interests of the reading public as much as it is dependent on editors.

Q: You mentioned that the Fulbright and exchange programs had been shut down after Tiananmen. Were there any changes in their status during your time there, 1989-92?

YATES: In the beginning, no. The Chinese were miffed. In their view, we had unilaterally canceled the Fulbright program, and they said we had reneged on an international agreement. Our position was that we had not and could not, since we could not force American citizens to do anything they did not want to do. When the so-called "incident" of Tiananmen occurred, many of them picked up and went home because of personal decisions they had made. They felt the security in China was not good enough for them. Some of the English teachers, those who were so-called "foreign experts," stayed, but all the Fulbrighters left.

The problem was, how could we get things back on track. The Chinese felt that if we could simply call off an international agreement at a whim or just because people get discomfited, the agreement obviously wasn't worth anything. They essentially stopped work on the Fulbright program for a couple of years. We pushed very hard to get that program reestablished. Another part of that difficulty was that Chinese Fulbright grantees who had gone to the U.S. rarely returned. One of our basic interests in China was the teaching of American studies in Chinese universities. We had a fairly good group of people teaching American literature, culture, and economics in Chinese universities. Those were naturally the ones who often would be selected as Fulbright grantees to come to the U.S., because they spoke some English, were in the academic environment, and had topics that needed direct experience and study in the U.S.

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We would go to a university, as I did in Shanghai, and sit with the university dean to discuss the problem. At one point, he said, "Look. We love Fulbrighters. We have always had Fulbrighters here and have a long history of foreign teachers, but our people are not coming back." In the Chinese system, when a grantee left China, his position at the university would be kept open for his return. The grantee may have intended to come back, but because of the turmoil or other things, he didn't. That meant the American studies programs throughout China were decimated. The trained instructors had all left. By their own rules, the Chinese universities couldn't fill the positions until they either returned or notified their universities that they would never come back. They could not make such a notification, for that would mean that they would have to change their visa status from student or visiting scholar to that of immigrant, something that most could not or would not do. That meant there were all these empty spaces, and there were no teachers to teach American studies.

Younger American-studies scholars who were qualified and promising could not accept Fulbright grants, because they could not get permission to travel until their predecessors returned. The Chinese official interest in these programs dried up. American studies programs were faltering badly throughout China because of a lack of people to teach.

We wanted to bring American Fulbrighters into China to do the same thing, to teach American studies. But we couldn't get them in either, because the Chinese said if they could not send Fulbrighters out, they were not going to allow any more Fulbrighters in. They essentially laid their cards on the table, saying, "Until you solve the problem of getting our people back, we are not going to talk to you." That was a pretty difficult situation. Another of my interregnum duties when I was Acting Public Affairs Officer was to sit down with the minister of education and try to work out a negotiated agreement, to get the wheels moving again so we could start grantees moving back and forth. We discussed an endless array of options.

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The one I had favored was where we would send Chinese Fulbrighters to the U.S. for six months at a time, instead of a full year. One of the problems was, if you send a Fulbrighter to the U.S. to study for a PhD, that ends up as at least four years, an awful long time to be away from home. Therefore, we would allow them to take their wives. In four years, a man and his wife will produce an American citizen. Once they had a child or two, the equation changed. Besides, American universities are warm hearted places, so that if an intensive, personable, and talented researcher is working hard on a subject and gets a PhD, he immediately wants to start post-doctoral research. In four years, they became quite settled in the American university environment. They may have accumulated lots of American friends, probably an apartment, a car, maybe even a green card, depending on how they worked things out, and very often an American citizen in the family.

Now, they have a problem. He goes to his dean and says, "My child is getting older and we want to give him or her opportunities and education. I like working here, your people seem to like me, and I'm doing good work and would like to stay on." The wise faculty member will say, "Well, of course, we will do what we can." And they did. They would write their Congressman, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, make all kinds of appeals, and guarantee a supporting income by giving the "temporary" Chinese Fulbright grantee a job. So now it is six years and counting. Now the little American citizen is getting bigger and close to school age. They are really interested in this because now they can get a free American education for their children, but if they go back to China, what is their situation? The child doesn't fit in. He or she speaks English. What do they do with the kid? The humanitarians among us would say, "Of course, we should make sure that the child can stay and build his future." Many of them put down deep roots, and it is not very likely they will ever go back. So where does that leave the Fulbright program in China? No where, essentially. It was a very hard sell. The Chinese felt there was nothing in it for them. We send their best scholars to study in the U.S., and they do not go back. In return, they receive a group of temporary scholars who come in for six or seven months and then immediately go back to the US. That is a brain drain that a developing country can ill

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afford. In addition, many of the U.S. scholars that enter China are not always the best in their field. Sometimes, they could not adapt readily to the life style on the Chinese campus, and most often could speak no Chinese. Consequently, some of the Fulbrighters became glorified English teachers and thereby became frustrated. Those that were acquainted with the Chinese culture and language usually were China scholars, interested primarily in research, not teaching. Even if they could teach, the Chinese do not need foreigners teaching them their own history and culture.

Of course, if you look at the personal side of things, many of the Chinese Fulbrighters had a tough time making the choice to return. Faculty members in China often do not have their own apartments and have to live at home with their families of six or eight people in a two bedroom apartment. If they are lucky, they have running water at the end of the hall. Their living standard would take a tremendous nose dive by going back. They can live in a run down section of town in Washington and be four times better off than they would be in Beijing. So it becomes very, very hard to say to somebody like that, you must go home. Consequently, what was suggested at the time and almost got adopted, was a program by which university exchanges would occur, not in PhD programs but for six month segments, without spouses or children, after which the grantee would return to the sending school. Following another semester or two teaching in China, the grantee would then have the option to return to the U.S. under the same conditions for another six months to continue the program started earlier. Another facet of the program would be that two schools would participate as sister universities in the exchange. U.S. Fulbrighters would be the "sponsors" of the Chinese Fulbrighter while they were in the US, and perhaps would become return U.S. Fulbrighters to the other school on the Chinese side. These internal linkages would militate against the earlier problems, since on each side, there would be responsible to keep the door revolving.

We eventually did work out something so that a limited number, I think the first year it was 12 Fulbrighters, were exchanged, principally Americans going to China. The reverse flow did not really get underway. One of the problems was in China finding someone who was

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up to the business of going as a Fulbright grantee to the US, language being among the principal problems. If they were going to be an engineer, then it was easy, because the Chinese are whizzes at math, physics, chemistry, etc. and any American university would kill to get a qualified, highly competent Chinese mathematician, chemist, or physicist. They are great. So that meant if they got them, they would never let them go. It doesn't take very much research to find Chinese names in almost any of the disciplines such as computers, math, etc. They are all over the U.S. and very widely respected. Our argument was that eventually, they probably would go home, but a return within the original expectation of four years probably would not be met. We could understand that as part of the program and still argue that China would eventually benefit much from the knowledge they acquired in the US. The Chinese needed their skills immediately, as their own industry was growing rapidly and they needed a strengthened base of qualified intellectuals. But despite the problems, the program did get started again and as far as I know is prospering. It is a good program.

That raises one of the problems for Americans operating as diplomats in China. You do not have much opportunity to go where people live or to see somebody at home. While I was in China, only once did I have that opportunity in three years of living in Beijing. That was the director of a publishing house that I was dealing with on contracts. He was a university professor, a publisher, an entrepreneur. He was in business. He invited me to come to his house, which I did. This man was the president of his own company, a noted scholar, an author of a dozen books, and had many business connections. He lived in a third floor walk-up, a small dark apartment in Beijing. He had a television set and a small rug. His wife and mother and kids were all around, and it was crowded. I never found out if they had separate toilet facilities or not. Obviously, they were of very limited means. If he had the same job here in the U.S., he could have been living in McLean or some similar place with a fancy house, a lawn, and probably two dogs.

But in China, he had nothing. He was a smart man, a capable guy with a lot of dreams and ideas about how to reform the publishing business in China, particularly on the sales

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and marketing side. We had long conversations about marketing techniques and how to move a product and promote it on the Chinese market. He was an education to me. But again, his living standard was very, very low. It is hard for Americans to understand the pressures on people in China and how much commitment to their country it takes to stay at home. He could have jumped ship. Although he wasn't rich, he was rich enough to be able to get himself out of the country if he wished, but he stuck it out. Perhaps there is a form of patriotism that we have lost in the U.S. with our open and free government and comfortable style of living.

You had to have respect people who either had such strong ties to their family or their community or their nation, for that matter, to take the loss of what they knew was better. Many of them have relatives in the U.S. and know what the situation is here. You get mixed feelings after a while, living in a culture like that and a lot of respect for the people who are there. So when human right advocates come by and say, "Shut down trade with China, kill it. If they are not going to do what we like, we are going to stop it," who are they hurting? They are not hurting the government, for it is going to survive, whatever we do. But they are hurting those people who are trying so hard to make a living for themselves and build their own technical competence to make something better of life. I am not sure that heavy speeches on the floor of Congress are going to help those people much. But some real support in terms of slow incremental work probably will have a good effect in the long run.

Q: One last subject. You mentioned that contacts were very difficult and had been cut way back during the time you were there.

YATES: Yes, they were very hard. There was one technique that was important and probably the only technique that was useful. Like the people of most nations, the Chinese like to eat. Because food was not terribly good in quality or quantity in Beijing during the time we were there, one of the best ways to get people to come out to something was to invite them to dinner or any sort of meal; lunch, dinner, snack, it did not make much

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difference. It was not really possible to entertain Chinese at home, for they could not come to your home very easily. It was too uncomfortable for them, because they would have to go through security lines to get there. That would get them on lists to be watched and make their lives and those of their immediate family suspect. Certain Chinese such as many of those in the Foreign Ministry and those in international trade probably had been cleared for such contact, because they had a more sophisticated understanding of foreign living. But normal contacts, particularly among my publisher friends, would not enjoy such easy relations. In any event, hotels were available.

A Chinese guest could be taken to a hotel restaurant fairly easily, since there was almost no security in Chinese hotels and, particularly in the period immediately following Tiananmen, Chinese citizens were allowed to enter the hotels freely, because many of them could not depend on foreign tourists or businessmen to support their existence. In that lean economic period, the up-scale Chinese business kept many hotels afloat solely on their Chinese restaurant patrons. People, therefore, could go and come at will. Sometimes, there were security people around, but they were far, far less intrusive than they would have been in a diplomatic compound. That meant my contacts, in many cases publishers, would be delighted to go to lunch with me, especially if I was going to pick up the tab at an expensive foreign hotel. Relatively speaking, a lunch at a tourist hotel did not amount to a lot of money, but it made an enormous difference to me in my ability to meet with some of these people in a casual, yet businesslike, setting. Office visits were difficult, because if you went to a Chinese office, that meant that person had to get clearance from his Danwei, his work unit, to allow you to come in. You can't just walk into an office in China. You have to go through a gateway where a person in uniform sits and asks, "Who are you and what do you want?" "Well, I am so-and-so and I am here to see such-and-such." "Have you made arrangements?" If you have not been cleared and approved beforehand, you are not getting in, even if the person wants to see you. So it was very difficult. That gradually began to break down as time went on. As I was more known to some of the publishing companies, I think I could have walked in off the street, although I

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never did, because that would put them in an awkward situation. The Chinese, of course, don't always live in gracious surroundings and would be embarrassed if you walk in on them in their shirt sleeves or even shirt off and in their underwear in the summer time, sitting in front of a fan, because there was no air conditioning. This doesn't lend itself to gracious living or gracious contacts. So you would go through all the formalities in making arrangements.

But feeding people was almost always good. The problem with feeding people was the activity came under what the U.S. government calls representation, which has very, very strong limitations on it. This is what is called by some members of congress the "booze budget;" in other words, American diplomats are abroad spending American taxpayers' money on booze, which was nowhere near the situation. Nonetheless, Congress didn't like it. This meant we were very, very circumscribed, unless we did it out of our own pocket. Beijing may not have been a world class city for food, but it was a world class city for price, and that meant that none of us could afford to go out and keep contacts using that technique out of our own pocket. So it put a significant crimp in our ability to operate.

However, we did have some resources, which were carefully and wisely used. Mostly, we took people to lunch, because the prices were cheaper. It was cheaper to take some one to lunch than dinner, because they expect less and the hotels were not as crowded either. This meant you could talk for a couple of hours over lunch and really get into things pretty well. I did most of my work with publishers at lunch. Toward the end, before I left in 1992, many of the publishers were beginning to get enough cash flow to feel able to reciprocate. Then we would go to some other restaurant, Chinese usually, where they had an account or something. They were happy with that. It meant they could use their official funds for food, and they always ate very well at these occasions.

Q: You left in 1992. Whither?

YATES: From China I went to Hawaii. A change of pace.

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Q: What were you doing in Hawaii?

YATES: In Hawaii I was USIA Advisor to the Commander-in-Chief.

Q: Not a POLAD but a USIAAD?

YATES: Yes, a USIAAD. The POLAD, or "Political Advisor," was down the hall. In the Pacific command, we had a very unusual setup.

Q: Why don't we do that next time?

YATES: Have we done everything on China? I haven't said much about the ambassadors. Stapleton Roy followed Jim Lilley, and while he was a very different kind of Ambassador, he had the same sort of pressures on him. Where Lilley was more intuitional, Stape Roy was more cerebral. I guess that is one way to make a comparison. Lilley had instincts and still does, and most of the time they were very good. I think he used those as his guideline as much as he did intensive analysis. Stape Roy, I think, was more of an analytical person and relied less on instinct. I think Roy was a little more distant from his people than Jim Lilley, although they both were very much ambassadors, apart from the rest of the crew.

Like Lilley, Roy was born in China and spoke Chinese with a Szechwan accent which caused amusement and wonder among the Chinese staff and the Chinese people he would meet. His Chinese was so good that he would just blow them away. I think the Chinese had a lot of respect for Roy, but I think he had the same problems as Lilley in terms of making and maintaining contacts. I think Roy enjoyed a better set of working contacts in the business community, because business by then had prospered to the point where Americans were much more accepted in China, and there was less fear on the Chinese side of somehow being coopted by contact with the Americans. We had not reached full confidence in that regard, and we still have not. I think it still is a long way off.

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One aspect of the Chinese which is important in the context of East Asian relations is cultural. By comparison, Japanese and Americans have difficulty getting along at times, because Japan is an island and always has been an island with a distinct culture and cultural variances from Americans that makes contact difficult. The distance they maintain from people in social discourse, for example, is very different from the continental Asians, including Koreans and Chinese.

The Chinese language, because of its patterns and sounds, also makes their accented English more comprehensible to an American. If you had a Japanese speaking English and a Chinese speaking English with equivalent abilities, the Chinese would probably be more easily understood by an English speaking person. On the cultural level, the Chinese have a better sense of "give and take" that is more characteristic of a continental society. China is more cosmopolitan than Japan in terms of multi-nationalities, so you get a different set of vibrations there. The potential for improvement in relations with China is enormous. We have a big hangup, of course, on both sides in terms of politics. However, on the basis of person-to-person relationships, the Chinese have an advantage that leads to an opportunity for improvement that other Asian groups may have greater difficulty with.

Q: All right. Next time we will pick it up in 1992 when you went to Hawaii.

YATES: Great.

Q: Today is May 19, 1997. You were the information advisor to CINCPAC, is that right?

YATES: I was the USIA advisor to CINCPAC.

Q: You were there from when to when?

YATES: From 1992-95.

Q: How did you get the job?

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YATES: That position, like many other non-mainstream positions in USIA, had been cut by decision of the Area Director for East Asia, as he felt that he wanted to keep more of the available resources in the field. The advisor's position in Hawaii was considered a "domestic" position, of course. Such domestic jobs stuck up like sore thumbs when people were pressed by downsizing and wanted to keep as much manpower in the field as possible. Yet there were countervailing arguments. The advisor's job in Hawaii was essentially to keep the U.S. command in the Pacific tuned to the special needs of its overseas presence.

The military, itself, was going through a downsizing process, and still is. At that time, they were cutting back on everything except what they called "war fighting capacity." In other words, if you drove a ship or a plane, that was fine. But if you were in uniform and were doing things like thinking about cultural ramifications and popular opinion ramifications of our military presence abroad, you were not considered as essential as those who actually had fingers on triggers. This is probably a reasonable distinction. If you have to give up on one or the other, the "war-fighting" capacity will have to take priority. The military role is to defend the U.S. and its people and the question is relative, I guess. In any event, that meant that the U.S. military in its presence abroad was not being served very well, because the lack of cultural and political sensitivity to the special conditions of operating overseas in the Pacific region cost a lot of efficiency.

If you are a commander from a base in the middle part of the continental U.S. and suddenly are transferred to the Pacific, how do you operate in Guam or Okinawa or some other place in Asia where your presence isn't welcomed or at least you are not considered an essential part of the local culture. You are a guest. The only office that really existed within CINCPAC to put that in context in a cultural way was the USIA advisor's office. When I came available and was looking around for my next assignment, I was asked if I would go and fill in for about a year, because they really didn't have an onward assignment

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for me at that time. This was an alternative to returning to Washington without an ongoing assignment, so I went to Hawaii.

People would say, "Gee, Hawaii. Aren't you lucky!" There wasn't as much luck in that as it might seem. Hawaii is a magnificent place. It is beautiful, the weather is gorgeous, and everything was terrific when certain kinds of conditions all come together. If you are a tourist with a lot of money and can travel around the islands and laze on the beach, it is magnificent and probably unparalleled in the world. But if you have to live there, you get a different perspective.

For one thing, Hawaii is very isolated. Many in the military had this same problem. It is a "rock" two thousand miles away from the nearest significant land mass. In Hawaii, people had all the advantages of the American system of goods and material things, but they were very, very much more expensive. When we arrived there, a box of Wheaties was seven dollars or something along those lines. It soon became very clear to us that Hawaii was going to be a very expensive place to live.

Rents are astronomical. During the time of the Japanese "bubble economy," when the Japanese had lots of money to invest everywhere, including Rockefeller Center, they bought up much of Hawaii, especially golf courses and real estate. The stories were legend of Japanese businessmen coming to Hawaii with a pocket full of cash and saying, "How much is that?" "Oh, about a million and a half." He would reach into his pocket and peel off a million and a half dollars and then ask, "What else do you have to sell?" There were no arguments, no negotiating. They were famous for paying whatever was asked. The immediate effect of that was skyrocketing housing costs.

That is okay, I guess, if the Japanese could afford it, but for Americans living there, Hawaii became a very, very expensive place to move to. Those who had owned houses for a long time and continued to own were not directly affected so much, I guess. If you were going to continue to live in Hawaii and sold your older house at a great profit, you had to turn

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around and buy something equally expensive. On the other hand, many people cashed in and sold at high prices before running off to the mainland where real estate was cheaper.

The weather was magnificent when it was nice. When the “trade winds” are up and the sun is shining, it is grand. When the trade winds drop, the weather immediately turns hot and sticky and you can recall that it is in the South Pacific. Because of its location, Hawaii is vulnerable to typhoons. Traffic is terrible. Hawaii is one of the most congested places in the world in terms of traffic. And of course, there are an awful lot of tourists adding to the congestion. So that was a problem. Nonetheless, the work at USCINCPAC was fascinating for a Foreign Service Officer. It was somewhat like living at a foreign post. The military had their own language, own social set, own conventions. When I walked into the job, I was confronted by an older man who was head of the CINCPAC Public Relations Section. He also handled Congressional Relations, and rather well I was told. He had the office across from me on what was called the “Bridge,” which was the center of command for the Pacific area. On that floor, they had the admiral of CINC (Commander in Chief) of CINCPAC; the Deputy Commander of Pacific U.S. forces (DCINC); Jim Wilkinson, the Political Advisor (POLAD), who had ambassadorial rank, (who as far as I know, retired in Hawaii); and the older, rather crusty gentleman who was congressional liaison as well as the public affairs guru. By virtue of my position, I was automatically at loggerheads with him, because while he was very knowledgeable about Congress, he didn't know very much about foreign affairs. There were no other command parts on the “Bridge,” that was it.

The command structure conformed to the usual military relationships, but both the POLAD and I as USIA advisor were add-ons. Because both the POLAD and I were outside of the other parts of the chain of command, it was possible to include us on the “Bridge” since there was office space there and it would not otherwise show favoritism among the other components, which fell under five basic categories, each represented by a number following the letter “J.” J means “joint” since CINCPAC was a joint headquarters. The numbers stood for the usual categories in the military J-1 for administration, J-2 for

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intelligence, J-3 for operations, J-4 for legal, and J-5 for policy and plans. For the most part, I worked with the J-5 people who handled all of the command relationships and had the greatest need to understand foreign relationships. The J-5 section included all the area offices. Although the U.S. military had begun heavy cuts in personnel, J-5 still had a lot of area offices: the Japan desk, the Philippines desk, the Russian desk, etc.

The Pacific Command (PACOM) was the largest U.S. military geographic command in the world. It ran from the west coast of California all the way to the island of Madagascar. That includes the Indian Ocean as well. It was a key player in the Middle East, because it provided ships, materiel, and aircraft to other commands during the Gulf War and any other insurgency that came about. Such assignments always involved the Pacific command, because it comprised such a large part of U.S. forces. There were about 100,000 in the Pacific command then on duty in the Pacific, of which about 30,000 were in Japan and another 37,000 in the Republic of Korea. That is an awful lot of Americans overseas. Many of these soldiers and sailors were on ships floating around the Pacific or Indian Oceans or in submarines. All were under the general command of PACOM, although there were some “dual hats” in Korea, where the same forces comprised a large part of the UN Command and both the U.S. Forces/Japan and the U.S. Forces/Korea had much autonomous authority.

Such “dual hatted” arrangements led to difficult relationships at times. Whoever was U.S. commander in Korea felt rather independent of the Pacific Command, and this arrangement could make smooth relationships a problem. For me, this meant some trouble in obtaining cooperation when that was important in program planning or developing a cohesive approach to a given problem.

My function at USCINCPAC was essentially writing advisories for the CINC and participating in meetings to monitor what was going on in terms of public relations with allies and other countries in the “area of responsibility.” Other facets of my work were developing an annual briefing program for Pacific military leaders, consulting on the

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preparation of the command's magazine, "Asia-Pacific Defense Forum," and sometimes participating in war games, a kind of think-tank exercise where members of the command and invited experts sit around a table and think deep thoughts about options in certain situations. The war games, at times, considered questions which were a bit far afield for a Foreign Service Officer who normally confronts only the real and present situation abroad. For example, "If Japan or China or another country becomes the enemy, what does the U.S. do and how does the military act to preserve U.S. interests?" Other times, the questions were more specific, such as a consideration of possible nuclear incidents. It was an interesting thing for someone like me to come out from the environment of the Foreign Service and walk into this very different military system. It took a while to become adjusted.

My advisories sometimes brought me into a bureaucratic struggle with the Public Affairs chief across the Bridge hall. He insisted that all of my memoranda to the Admiral be cleared by him before going to the CINC. While this might seem to be common sense, it proved to be a real roadblock. Certainly, he should be informed of my advisories on foreign public relations, but my feeling was that I was assigned to CINCPAC and not to his public affairs office. So I proceeded to direct my advisories straight to the CINC with info copies to him. That led to a number of occasions when he fired up strong dissents to my recommendations. While our relations were civil, he clearly was uncomfortable with my active role in providing advice to the command.

He finally retired, forcibly it turned out, since I was not the only one with a functional problem in dealing with such a strong personality. Nonetheless, the constant sniping on matters he had little knowledge of was debilitating to the orderly progress of discussion within the command on matters that were important to its function. Jim Wilkenson, the POLAD, was a strong supporter and had had working experience with USIA. He was a great booster in this internal struggle to provide the CINC with as candid and comprehensive advice as possible.

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Q: What was his background?

YATES: I do not remember much of the detail. Jim was a Thai linguist, and I recall that he had a tour as a Branch Public Affairs Officer in Cheng Mai in Thailand, but I am not certain. It is the case that he did have a tour with USIA, so he had a much broader appreciation of what we did than others in State might have. He was a real down-to-earth person who had a strong background in Asia. Q: I just wondered if he was a Far Eastern hand.

YATES: Yes, Thailand was his forte. He also spent time in Australia and other parts of the Pacific area. I had not known him before, because he was a Southeast Asian hand and I was a Northeast Asian hand. He ended up on the big island of Hawaii in retirement, teaching at the University of Hawaii's branch in Hilo. Anyway, he was a strong supporter and an important ally, because he had frequent and direct contact with the CINCPAC. The commander-in-chief, at the time, was Chuck Larson, who had four stars and had risen through the ranks rapidly. He was a rather young four star admiral. He had been Commandant of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis ten years before that and then gone to other commands and became the Commander of the Pacific fleet at one point. Then when there was a change at the top, he was moved literally "up the hill."

Camp H.M. Smith was actually the headquarters of the Marines of the Pacific and CINCPAC was a tenant up there on the top of the hill in a cooler part of Hawaii. That hill overlooked the U.S. Navy's headquarters at Pearl Harbor and had a beautiful view of Honolulu. Also below was Hickam Air Force Base. So both the Air Force and the Navy were in direct line of sight from the command headquarters on the hill. Of course, U.S. Army Pacific had its headquarters not far from Camp Smith. About 20 percent of the island of Oahu is covered by U.S. military installations. It is a big chunk of the island, a fact that is a steady source of controversy.

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The interpretation of the role of the Commander in Chief varies a lot, depending on the personality of who is in the seat, but certainly whoever is there, the job involves a great deal of travel. The admiral can be expected to be out of the office as much as he is in. That usually meant that the POLAD went along with him. I did not. However, I was involved. Each time one of these trips would come up, I had the task of putting together an advisory on the stops where he would be, keeping the total text to one page in the fashion of all briefing memos to the CINC. Of course, that was not always easy. For example, when he visited Okinawa, I would come up with a piece on the situation in Okinawa and some of the public affairs aspects that might emerge during his presence there.

The other thing I tried to do, was to set up media contact for him in the countries he visited through our USIS Posts. This was to give the local media a chance to interview him or at least get to know him. Every CINC has a different personality; some enjoy contact with the press, and others do not. Admiral Larson was in the middle. He knew it was important and enjoyed it if he were in full control, but he was an old submariner and that meant everything had to be screwed down real tight with no leaks before you dove. He insisted that things always had to be locked down before any initiative was taken, and that is very hard to do in an international environment. For instance, you cannot guarantee that all 15 invited media members will show up for a press conference. If you had a bad situation and only a couple or no media showed up, the Admiral would be very unhappy that he was wasting time that could have been devoted to something more productive. He was right, of course. But while he was seeing presidents and commanders-in-chief, his counterparts in other countries, he sometimes had less than full patience with scruffy journalists, who were more independent than he was. So that could be difficult.

However, when we had a happy event - when the two got together - Admiral Larson was a master of public relations. He looked like what most people would think of when they imagined an admiral; he walked and talked like an admiral and sounded like an admiral. If you were a casting director for a movie and wished to have someone to portray the perfect

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admiral, Admiral Larson would fit perfectly. Everything was just right, the epitome of the best you could think of in a military sense, a public relations dream. Always impeccably dressed with his Hawaii tan. He paid careful attention to his regimen of exercise, so he was in very fine physical shape. Plus he had a very quick mind. He still does, for after he completed his tour as CINC and retired, he was called back into service to return to the Naval Academy in Annapolis to pull it out of the scandal it had stumbled into.

He was a joy to work with, but he was sometimes difficult to reach because he was so busy traveling and handling the politics of the command. He did not always have much patience with public affairs, because of the sloppiness of those of the press who must be dealt with. However, he clearly understood the importance that public relations had, particularly in foreign nations where an antagonistic public could create very difficult problems to the smooth operations of military and security plans.

One of the most important programs that I operated in Hawaii was an annual event called the Symposium on East Asia Security, "SEAS." Through our embassies abroad, that program invited senior military commanders and officials from just about all the nations around the Pacific area in the PACOM area of responsibility, from the east coast of California all the way through to Madagascar, about 34 nations. Not all of those nations had a military, however, but even a small country like Fiji had an army. We would bring these officers, government officials, and a few academics together in Honolulu for about a week of discussion, examples, lecturing, and touring to see the presence of the U.S. military in the Pacific, what its shape was, what the components were, and to hear from the commanders themselves, including Admiral Larson, what exactly we were up to in the Pacific. No press was allowed. We allowed no uniforms, so everybody took his uniform off when they came through the door. The level was generally O-6 and above, O-6 being a colonel. We had some very, very high ranking people in that symposium that usually included about 20 to 25 participants.

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After a week in Hawaii of getting the American situation, we would take off to Japan where the Japanese would explain why the Americans are there, the purpose of the Japan-US security treaty, and how the Japanese view the East Asian security situation. That, of course, left them open to some very hot questions from people who were very suspicious of Japanese motives and capacities. The Japanese responses and the relationship with the Americans were usually an eye-opener for most of the Southeast Asians who were on the tour.

Then we would move to Korea where we would get the Korean point of view of the security situation in Northeast Asia, something most Southeast Asians had very little comprehension about, although many had read about the context of problems in the region. During that part of the symposium, we would go to the Osan Air Base to get a look at how Korean and American air forces worked together. How they operated together, what they did, where they ate, and how they fraternized. Then we went up to the DMZ (demilitarized zone) to take a look at the security situation on the line and get a briefing from the Koreans up there. We met with a Korean think-tank and tossed about the whole question of unification of the two parts of the Korean peninsula to get a political feel for the security situation in that key Northeast Asian country in its confrontation with the North.

From there, we would go to Singapore. In Singapore, we would do the reverse of what we did in northeast Asia and get the southeast Asian point of view on security issues. This was something the Japanese were always unsettled about, because they suddenly discovered that World War II was not as far in their past as they thought it had become. We broke the seminar up in Singapore. All of this took about three weeks. It was a fairly long period of time for senior people to be away from their commands and responsibilities.

Hawaii was also interesting, because we included as part of the SEAS program a visit to the East-West Center. That is an academic institution that exists to consider problems of the Pacific, particularly the South Pacific. Along with the North-South Center in Florida, it was congressionally funded and had a sometimes diffuse mandate to consider all aspects

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of the Pacific milieu. Security questions, however, were always controversial at EWC. There was a fairly sizable component of the faculty and staff that was strongly anti-military, a throw-back to the academic distrust of the military during the Vietnam era of the 60s. The anti-military group wished to keep a focus on the South Pacific and on broader issues such as the environment or energy.

The University of Hawaii on Oahu at Manoa in part reflected the general Hawaiian outlook; it is quite provincial, although it is in the middle of the Pacific and styles itself as a crossroads to Asia. It is not as cosmopolitan as one might find on the eastern seaboard or even on the western seaboard. Hawaii is remote, and its people consider it to have its own culture, own identity, own economy, and own problems. They tend to keep focused on their own collective navel. This meant that the East-West Center had some leftovers from the sixties, such as the protest movement, and anti-military sentiment was very strong. Some of them were unreconstructed flower people.

We had taken the SEAS group of military/security people to the East-West Center for a couple of years previously and were getting a little better at developing a program, I think. Usually, a day or day and a half was spent at the Center for a generic overview of American culture, society, economy, etc. This provided a base line of understanding the American political, economic, and cultural basis for support of the security operations in the Pacific. Yet the flower people targeted it in Hawaii and accused the East-West Center of kowtowing to the military chiefs and becoming openly supportive of the military. So the SEAS program came under specific attack, with critical articles appearing in the local university newspapers, even some with scornful cartoons charging that the Center was nothing but an intelligence operation for foreign military officers from all over the Pacific.

In a sense, this was partly true, because some of the people who were at the seminar were intelligence officers in their home countries. In fact, we welcomed them, because they were smart, fast learners and were important people in their respective military establishments. They were an important audience for us to have. This was particularly true

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for USIA. Around the world at different embassies, the military is a very difficult audience for USIA to program. Their interests involve subject matter that is difficult for a diplomatic organization to handle comfortably. We can talk to schools. We can talk to government officials or press. But when it comes to the military component of an audience, it is very hard to bring them in.

This is less so in Korea, because I remember when I was there, we had strong relations with the local military academy. But in many Asian societies, the military is still a very important component of public opinion, and they have more power than they do in most other countries; more certainly than in the US. Therefore, it was important for us to have this kind of contact, and as during my first year in Hawaii, I think I was able to convince our people in Washington that this aspect alone was sufficient to keep an officer in Hawaii working on the SEAS program as hard as he could. It was probably one of the few places that we really had the opportunity to have in-depth contact with the principal military establishments of the Pacific region. Thirty-four countries is nothing to sneeze at. And contact we did. By the time I left, the program had about 150 alumni all over the Pacific. Many of them were in very high positions in their own military organizations.

For example, when I was on one of the SEAS trips, I pinned the third star on a Thai general who was promoted during the trip. We had any number of very strong, politically centered people from the Minister of the Interior in Fiji, to presidential advisors out of Mongolia; people who had direct input into the foreign policy of their government. The SEAS program became a very critical point of contact for us, with a large number of those who showed promise of becoming very influential people.

Q: Were the Chinese included in this?

YATES: Yes. They were one of my principal objectives when I arrived in Hawaii and began work on the SEAS program, since I had just come from China. It was perfect for the Chinese. We worked very hard on that, and it took a couple of years to get it started,

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because the Chinese were very suspicious of our motives. However, they were also hungry for the program, because it meant we would be taking senior Chinese military officials into some very classified areas of the U.S. military, giving them the chance to talk directly to military commanders and make contacts not only with the U.S., but also with senior military people we had brought together from all over the Pacific. The Chinese clearly saw that as an advantage to them and could not resist.

The first Chinese to participate was Major General Lee Zhi Yun, one of their finest. He was a marvelous man. A consummate diplomat and a cool headed negotiator. He was the head of the Study of Foreign Armies at the Beijing Military Academy. His job was to teach senior military commanders about foreign militaries. Students had to have stars on their shoulders to attend the classes. He came and was a sensation.

Part of the trip to Hawaii was a visit to ships, both the Aegis class cruisers and submarines. We had a major general of the Chinese army for the first time, I think, in contact with a wide variety of the newest and best of American military tools. Real ground was broken, taking him down into the guts of a Los Angeles class attack-sub where he was in the control room that had big signs on the door "Restricted Area Do Not Enter." He sat in the chair where people would sit when the submarine was underway, and he could observe the mechanisms that would control SOSUS cables and other devices that would track other ships and detect submarines. This just blew his mind away. We also took him on an aircraft carrier in Japan. Yokosuka is the home port for the U.S. Pacific fleet, and there usually was an aircraft carrier there, most often the Independence. That was always a remarkable visit for the Chinese. I only had two years of tours with the Chinese on board, but that participation in the SEAS program was a fine example to the Chinese of the American approach to "transparency" as a basic principle of stable military relations.

With some trouble, we also brought the Russians in. It took years to get them in because of the infighting in Moscow. The Russians were very suspicious of the program and

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several times accepted initially and then dropped out of participation. However, they had an interest in participating for the same reasons the Chinese did.

The first Chinese participant, Major General Li Zhi Yun, and I had a chat in Singapore before he went back to Beijing. When I went into his room, he had a stack, which must have been an inch or 2 inches thick, of very carefully kept notes in the middle of his coffee table. So he really had an eleven course meal of security relations in the Pacific. The most striking part of the trip for him, as well as for the US, I think, was in Korea when he went up to the DMZ. There was a major general of the Chinese army going up to look at the North Koreans from the other side. He never mentioned it, and so as not to embarrass him in a situation where his understanding was more important than my curiosity, I never asked, but he was certainly of the right age and rank to have fought in the Korean War.

One of the show pieces that the Koreans use on the DMZ is the infiltration tunnel that was discovered a number of years ago and is now open for tourists to clamber down into. You may recall a number of years ago when the South Koreans discovered the infiltration tunnel. An engineer who had designed one of the tunnels defected to the south and told the South Korean military where the North Koreans began to dig, and on a piece of paper drew the direction the tunnel was heading. In that indicated area, the South Koreans drilled a number of holes in the ground. They knew the North Koreans were digging along the line, but trying to find where was pretty difficult. But with the engineer's plans, they were able to intercept the tunnel with a bored hole. Down the hole, they lowered a camera with lights and looked around. It was all dark, and the North Koreans claimed it was a coal mine. When they finally were able to complete an intercept tunnel and actually climb down, the South Koreans discovered that the North Koreans had coated the walls with lamp black, which would make the walls look like coal.

That was the little story we, like other tourists, were told before we went down into the tunnel. Out of some concern for his relatively advanced years and with some admitted excitement to be on hand when the encounter was to take place, I followed MG Li down

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along the long staircase through the intercept tunnel. Sure enough, when we got down to the bottom and entered the North Korean infiltration tunnel, the first thing Major General Li did was to press his hand to the wall. It came away black. He walked around for awhile and then we returned up the long flights of stairs to the surface. When we emerged from the tunnel, the Chinese general was still holding his hand stiffly out with all the black stuff on it. I sat next to him on the bus and asked, "What is that?" He responded, "Can you believe this?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Look at this?" I said, "Your hand is dirty." He said, "Can you believe that anybody would be so naive as to think anybody at all would believe this?" His incredulity was a stinging rebuke to his North Korean allies who had made the original claim.

On each of these SEAS trips, we would take escorts along from the U.S. military. At that time, there was a member of the USCINCPAC J-5 group who was very knowledgeable about Korea. He was Mark Shoemaker, a U.S. Army Colonel who had been assigned on the DMZ for a long time. He sat with Major General Li in the bus going up to the DMZ and was able to explain the military sights along the way. There was a tank trap. Over there, you can see a camouflaged fortified position, etc. He gave MG Li a full explanation that very much impressed him. When we later arrived in Singapore, MG Li told me, "Look, I am a professional military man with more than three decades of professional service. I found the trip in Korea very interesting." He continued, "It is an article of faith in the Chinese People's Liberation Army that the U.S. and South Koreans are in an offensive posture in the south and are waiting to pounce on the North Koreans. But, I know a defensive position when I see one."

That was a remarkable observation from a senior member of the PLA. There are a number of obvious features that supported that conclusion. When you go across the Imjin river on the southern edge of the DMZ, the bridge is old and about ready to fall down. It was pointed out in the lecture on the tour that the bridge has charges underneath it, so it will

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drop immediately if there is any indication that the North is beginning to come South. Obviously, the UN command was not building reinforced invasion routes to the north.

MG Li said, "Seeing is believing." Being able actually to see the condition of the South was convincing to him. He cautioned, "However, I am a professional military scholar who observes foreign militaries as part of my responsibilities. If I were a line commander and went back to Beijing, I could never say a word about what I saw. No one would believe me, and all that I would accomplish would be to bring harm to myself and my reputation. But I am an academic. I teach. My business is to tell what I see. I can tell them, even though no one is going to believe me. They will think I have been brainwashed here, that I have been co-opted by the enemy. But the facts are there and gradually over the years - it will take a long time - the Chinese military will come to understand what the situation in Korea actually is."

To me, that was a telling moment of this particular program, because it represented a senior set of eyes from the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army looking at a situation from a new and different point of view. I suggested to Major General Li that after he got back to Beijing, he make a point to go to the North again and look at the same view from the Northern side for comparison.

While we were on the way up to the DMZ near the Imjin River, there is a rest stop just before you cross the bridge to enter the DMZ. It is the last point that casual tourists can get to from the south. In the back of the restrooms and souvenir shop, there is a small park with some of the weapons from the war. In the park, there is also a train with the tracks cut to the north of the northward headed engine. This is the train ready to go north when unification is accomplished, or so the story goes. It is a symbol of reunification. While we were walking around there with Major General Li, there was an older farmer sitting over there smoking a cigarette and just sort of watching tourists.

Q: He was over sixty years old?

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YATES: I am sure he was easily over sixty years old. He was obviously a local, and probably a resident in the area long enough to have been there during the Korean War. He must have seen a lot happen.

Anyway, we were standing there and, of course, Major General Li was in civilian clothes - like an elderly gentleman of Taiwan - and I was obviously a long-nose American. He smiled. I asked him to come over, so we could get a picture. He obliged us long enough to pose with MG Li in front of the engine and then, with the usual friendly and hospitable Korean gusto, shook hands with MG Li and me. So I now have a picture of a major general of the Peoples Liberation Army of China, standing with a Korean farmer, all smiles. I don't know what the man would have said or done had he known who this particular Asian gentleman was.

We had another incident up in the north which I think revealed some of the value of the trip. Indonesia for many, many years has been a non-aligned country. We had Indonesians on the trip, particularly one very smart, capable, acerbic professor of security affairs. One reason she was there was because she taught in the military academy in Jakarta. Part of the general tour of the DMZ was a visit to the site of negotiations at Panmunjom. When you go into the small quonset hut where negotiations are actually held, the other side must be out. However, the northern military remain outside of the building looking in through the side of the building that resembles a long tube cut in half. When the tour group enters, they close the doors at both ends and you can mill around inside, and actually "cross into North Korean territory" (the other side of the table) while the UN command representative gives a little spiel about the height of the flags and all the cute vignettes they have about negotiations with the North. While we were standing there, the North Korean soldiers were outside the building looking in, taking pictures and scowling. They always do that, perhaps to show a kind of disdain for the imperialist forces or whatever.

The problem for them at this time was that this lady was from Indonesia and considered herself non-aligned and a person of dignity. While I was hanging in the back, she came

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over to me and said, "Why are they doing that?" I was puzzled. "Doing what?" "That," she said, indicating the windows where the Northern Koreans were glaring and staring at our group. She said, "Why is he looking at me like that?" Finally catching her point of frustration, I responded, "You will have to ask him, I don't know." "But that is rude," she sputtered. She was so upset, she could hardly speak. In an Asian sense, the North Koreans were being disrespectful to her. They perhaps did not understand who she was, but nonetheless, she recognized herself as a person who was offended by the clear rudeness she was being subjected to from a fellow Asian, and worse, a national of a nation her own country had often given international support to. It was a rudeness that Americans would likely just look at as part of the show. But to an Asian from a non-aligned country, this was extreme rudeness, and she couldn't get over it. She carried that image with her at least as far as the last days of the symposium in Singapore.

I recall when we were in the process of de-briefing our participants on the conduct of the symposium in order to get some feedback to be used to strengthen subsequent SEAS programs, she again brought up that incident in Panmunjom. How could it ever be the case that someone who they had supported for so long could be so rude to one of them? It was inconceivable to her. I would guess that she carries that image with her to this day.

The second thing that was evident to Indonesians on the trip was the relationship between the Koreans and the Americans. This was particularly important and was demonstrated at Osan Air Base, outside of Seoul, where Korean pilots fly the same equipment as American pilots, go to the same training, have the same mess halls, obviously know each other and play golf together on weekends. Coming out of an environment where the Dutch had for so long held Indonesia as a colony, this was a remarkable kind of relationship. Filipinos don't think about these things, because they have been for so long in association with American military forces. But to somebody out of Indonesia with the Dutch tradition of colonialism, it was very striking. One did not have to explain everything. They could easily see the state of the relationship, and it was apparent that this was a different environment.

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A different kind of thing was seen by a Malaysian general during his first visit in Hawaii. As part of the Honolulu visit just to soften things up a bit, we would go to a luau run by the Hale Koa Hotel. The Hale Koa Hotel is a military rest-and-relaxation facility. On a tranquil evening walking back from the luau to the Ilikai Hotel where the group was staying, the Malaysian brigadier tugged at my sleeve and said, "I have a question." "This place, is it for officers?" "No, it is for anyone in the military," I responded. "You have enlisted people there?" I explained, "Most of the people probably are enlisted." He said, "They are staying together?" It was very difficult for him to understand, having been accustomed to the old British concept that a mixing of the ranks was not appropriate. But to see everybody able to sing together, carry on together, eat together, to have a good time together, without any regard to rank or station, was to him quite a revealing experience. Again, it was an example of a very American kind of thing.

The luau at the Hale Koa was a seminal place for observing Americans and their culture. Because it was a military R&R stop, elements of patriotism were more visible than they might have been at a comparable hotel or night club in the civilian community. I remember the Chinese major general was with us the second year I took the group to the luau and there were 200-250 people out on the lawn enjoying dinner, drinking, and the show. In the show was an MC in a white suit who sings and carries on a constant dialogue with the audience. Of course, there was the standard bit where the audience participates in a hula, and other kinds of "where are you from?" questions to the group which usually came from all over the US. Because we were a relatively large group, mostly foreign, the MC (master of ceremonies) would recognize the several tables where we sat. Usually one or more of our members would be asked to attempt the hula, and almost always one of the more outgoing types would volunteer, with much jeering and hooting from our tables. This helped to bring the group together.

At the end of the program, the MC had a standard routine that was used to close the program. Since the Hale Koa Hotel not only accepted active military but retirees as

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well, there was always a large contingent of older Americans on vacation in Hawaii. He would ask, "Anybody here from the Spanish American War?" There would be great laughter. "Anybody here from the First World War?" Sometimes there would be an old frail hand rise in the back, possibly from someone seated in a wheelchair. That was kind of remarkable and a sense of wonderment would spread through the audience. Then he would go on listing the conflicts right down through the Second World War, the Korean conflict, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and all the different incidents when the nation was at war, particularly in the Pacific. People would stand up, and everybody would applaud. The MC would say, "I finally want to give some recognition to the veterans of these different conflicts, because so often it is not given." All would applaud loudly.

Even for an American, watching all of these people stand up gives one a sense of reality to some of the stuff you see in the movies. It gives you an internal buzz when you realize that there is so much history collected together in one place. Our foreign military group was thunderstruck by this, because for them most of the wars and military actions were the stuff of history books or newsreels. Often they had seen those actions as American imperialism with malicious intent. To see the real people who actually had been in those conflicts, some of them obviously injured or disabled as a result, was an incredibly powerful experience.

Following the recognition of the veterans, everybody stands up, links arms and sings God Bless America swinging back and forth. Here we had non-Americans from 20 or so different countries all linking hands, including the Chinese major general, and singing at the top of their lungs God Bless America. To an American, it is a sight that is as unbelievable as it was profound. Some of those lustily singing with the rest were on the other side of the line in those conflicts. In all the SEAS groups I participated in, there was never a critical word said about the experience. Just the reverse, the luau evening spoke volumes on a subject that would have been difficult if not impossible to explain to our

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diverse group of foreign military. The emotion of the evening and the human warmth of the event made it one of the most important elements of the SEAS program.

I had a hard time justifying a luau on our official expenses, but we were able to do that by bending a few things such as subsuming the cost under the allowance given to each grantee for board. Without doubt, it was worth the effort. What they were taking out of the experience said a lot about the American spirit and the attitudes of the American military. The social event also cemented relationships within the group that were to be very important in subsequent days as very delicate national issues were discussed and contrasted. It was far more effective than anything we could ever have accomplished in a week of serious lectures. So the SEAS program had a lot of facets.

Another important part of SEAS was the “kick-off” session on the first day. Everybody came in and sat around tables arranged in a square with all seats of equal prominence. Of course, the group was drawn from nations that often have been at odds. The Japanese and Chinese, the Singaporeans and the Malaysians, Japanese and Koreans, etc. For example, every time they would come in for this first session, the Japanese would sit on one side of the room and the Koreans would sit on the other. They wouldn't talk to each other or look at each other. By the time we got to Singapore, they were drinking buddies.

At that first session, we gave time to each national representation, sometimes it was two, sometimes only one, to stand and give a five minute presentation on the security situation in their country. There was not enough time to be very comprehensive, but the occasion required each person to stand and say something to the entire group. It was a fascinating seminar in Asian relations, because you went from a Nepalese brigadier who lambasted all his neighbors for interfering in his country and causing trouble, to a Japanese who would give a very comprehensive overview of the Japanese economic situation in the Pacific, to a Korean who didn't share the Japanese view of the situation in the region, to someone from China who felt beset by everyone. Gradually as the SEAS symposium progressed and after three weeks of eating together, arguing together, sleeping together, traveling

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together, the group formed remarkable bonds. It was something like what happens at camp among children who spend several weeks together during the summer. We now have a very strong alumni association from these SEAS seminars. We have a newsletter which comes out every year and indicates where former participants are now, what their titles and addresses are, and what the experience was of the immediately preceding SEAS program.

In most countries in Asia, there is a very strong tradition that sharing an educational experience with someone makes you a life-long friend. That same bonding was very active in the relationships among those participating in the SEAS program. The professional connections established in the program was one of its primary goals. If there comes trouble between two nations that prompts a confrontation of arms, it would be useful to the cause of stability if a senior officer on one side of the line were able to give a call to a similar ranking officer on the other to see if the confrontation might be worked out bloodlessly. The bonding that occurs in the SEAS symposia may be adequate to accomplish the task. Recognition of the importance of the program was given in the attention paid to SEAS in each of the capitals it visited. Usually the U.S. Public Affairs Officer hosted a reception at the embassy, attracting not only the presence of the U.S. ambassador and many of the senior members of the mission, but also the military attaches of many of the countries represented in the program. It was relatively rare that an essentially military group was assembled for a social event. Spin-off benefits of the reception included more frequent contact between U.S. military attaches and their counterparts in that capital, but also the chance to “rub elbows” for each of the other countries' attaches as well. It is common in Asian cultures to build strong bonds with those with whom you study. If a person has been a student with another, there is a life-long bond. This principle transfers to a variety of military programs. For example, the Army Command and Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth in Kansas trains a lot of foreign military, and they highly value the training as a mark of a “fast burner” in their own military societies. When the SEAS group moved from capital to capital, it was common for

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those who were Leavenworth graduates to search out fellow graduates of that program and, once found, make great efforts to get together. Remarkable interconnections run throughout many foreign armies. The SEAS program became a very important coalescing point for each of the posts we visited, in terms of bringing their military contact people together in a situation where we could talk about something relevant to post objectives.

By the time we finished in Singapore with each of these groups, the consensus was very clear. The U.S. military posture in the Pacific is one of maintaining stability. We were keeping people apart, maintaining a commonly desired sense of stability even though there were times that national interests among the Pacific Rim nations were in conflict. To some, this smacks of “playing policeman,” but for most, this was not the sense that prevailed. They, instead, saw the U.S. as a benign presence, a buffer which separated the conflicted nations, giving them time to sort things out short of outright conflict. There was no “arresting” or “judging” on the part of the US. Just “being there” made all the difference. That, of course, also meant that the U.S. was not a welcome player in the internal conflicts of these nations. As long as we minded our own business and simply hung around the neighborhood, we were welcome. If we crossed the line and interfered, the mood was entirely different. Singapore was a prime example of this principle.

In Singapore, each of the SEAS groups would visit Paya Lebar, a Singaporean airbase and important strategic military location for the city state. On one of the SEAS trips, we included a Malaysian flag officer, and as far as anyone knows, he was the first Malaysian flag officer ever to visit that airbase. Over the years, Singapore and Malaysia maintained a wary distance from each other. This visit of the Malaysian flag officer, if it did not really break new ground, at least served to strengthen a needed communication and a building of trust. Again, the U.S. played a benign, but central, role in improving that military situation.

Another example of the precedent-setting role of SEAS occurred when we took a Chinese major general to Korea for the first time. I had a devilish time trying to get him a visa from

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the Korean Ministry of Justice. Korea and China had just opened diplomatic relations, and here was a senior member of the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army wanting to visit. They tried but could not get a visa for him in Beijing, even though there was a Korean Embassy there. I implored the Korean Consulate in Honolulu to process a visa after he arrived in Hawaii but had no success. Each time the embassy or consulate pointed down the road. So we flew off to Tokyo without a visa for him for Korea. In Tokyo, I called the Korean consulate and said I urgently needed a visa. The answer I got was "Well, it may be difficult." "Look," I said, "This officer is coming with a group which is sponsored by the U.S. government. We are bringing him to Korea on a study mission of the military. Your foreign ministry people are involved in this, as are your defense people." Of course, because it was the Justice Ministry in Korea that handles immigration and consular affairs, they evidently had no directives on the visit of ranking military officers of the service that is the "blood ally" of their sworn enemy.

In desperation, I took a car from the American Embassy and went to the Korean consulate with Major General Li Zhi Yun's passport, visa application, and pictures. Finding the visa section, I asked for the consul and sat down in his office, saying that I would not budge until I was got a visa placed in MG Li's passport. We had to leave for Seoul the next morning, and if he did not get a visa, there would be a major embarrassment for both Korea and the US. This presented the benighted consul with a huge problem. After fretting a bit, but unwilling to risk a bit of effrontery with his country's major ally, he got on the phone and passed the hot potato up the chain to Seoul. The poor man really sweated this one out. There were successive consultations with his superiors. Each time he would hang up, glance at me - perhaps hoping I would somehow simply disappear - look desperately downcast and quietly remain behind his desk, sweating. Finally, after one of the wearying calls, he dejectedly reached down and opened a drawer of his desk, took out a stamp, gave MG Li's passport a stamp and a quick signature. Passing it to me with a weak smile, he said that he hoped that would be sufficient. I thanked him well and departed.

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Of course, the real test of the forcefully obtained visa was at the entry point at Kimpo airport on arrival. I made sure that MG Li was immediately behind me in the immigration line. To my surprise, there was not even a blink or pause from the official clearing my group. I was certain they must have been fully briefed on his entry and played their roles well. MG Li was, I expect, the first high-level PRC military official to visit Korea outside of the formal diplomatic mission and was a sensation, but everyone was cool, almost blas#. So that was a good start.

Everywhere we went with MG Li, we broke new ground with that man, because it was so sensational. Yet the most common reaction from both official and non-official Koreans was perfect disbelief. When we arrived at one of the senior think tanks in Seoul for discussions, the printed guest list included MG Li as from the Republic of China. I would have to say, not the Republic of China but the People's Republic of China. I would get a blank look. Respectful, but blank. Obviously the foreign guest, me, was sorely confused. They would look at me deeply, perhaps scanning for other less obvious signs of dementia, turn away and simply ignore my correction. They could not understand where this man was from. Those who did understand the import of the visit were discrete.

As in other aspects of the program, the mad Americans were indulged, but the purpose of the visit was accomplished. MG Li went to the Republic of Korea. He was treated well and was respectfully included in the discussions, along with those who were also allies of the Republic of Korea. I have to believe that it had a refreshing effect on those who met and discussed issues with MG Li. He was articulate, forceful, and obviously well briefed on the PRC position. However, the discussions were not exercises in name calling or polemics. Rather they were polite encounters where the participants did not see eye to eye on important issues but still could treat each other as respected members of the common human race. A small, but important victory.

It was incidents such as these that made the SEAS program so important for us and important for those who participated in the program. Although it was expensive because

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of the touring that was necessary, the food and transportation costs, it was by far the cheapest thing we could do in terms of impact for the taxpayers' dollar. We were able to consolidate an understanding among all of these nations in the Pacific of what we were about, why we were there, what our intents were and more importantly, why everybody else thought it was important for them to have us there. This message was communicated directly to those in their military organizations who were looked to for the development of strategy or intelligence. They were the intellectuals who were an essential part of the modern army, the thinkers who had much to say about the development and direction of security policy in their own nations.

There were many of these vignettes in each of the SEAS programs. I remember several times when we would go to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, sit around a table, and have a briefing by one of their very articulate people on the policy of self-defense and the role of U.S. forces in Japan. Someone of our group would ask, "Why do you allow the American military on your soil?" They would get the answer, full blast. Essentially, "Because it is important to us and in our national interest to have them here. We are not being nice to or cowed by the Americans. We want them here, because they are important to us and they sustain confidence in the region that we are not going to get involved in something in the rest of Asia again." That was a good and powerful message. They might have gotten a different answer had we gone to Okinawa, but in Tokyo, the official view was important.

I think most understood it in the military sense, because when they got to Singapore, it was also apparent to the SEAS group that Singaporeans had the same feeling. Lee Kwan Yew, for example, offered Singapore as a way-station for American forces in Southeast Asia and was soundly criticized by the Southeast Asians at the time, but I think now in retrospect, they agree with his initiative and he is benefitting by it commercially, because of contracts. These messages were reinforced, because representatives from Japan, Korea, and Singapore were traveling as members of the SEAS group and other members could grill them for confirmation and details as they traveled from stop to stop. Since they were becoming fast and trusted friends, the responses were credible and accepted. This

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reinforced the message that in other situations would have been very difficult to make convincing.

Q: While you were there in this 1992-95 period, was there any particular crisis from your perspective that you had to deal with on the international scene?

YATES: Anything that happened in the Pacific was important to the command. One of the stressful things at the time was the New Zealand problem. The New Zealanders, of course, broke up the ANZUS treaty, and they were always placed in a special category, because of their refusal to allow U.S. ships to visit New Zealand ports unless the U.S. would confirm that the particular ship did not carry nuclear weapons and was not powered by nuclear energy. Because of these restrictions, the U.S. refused to send any U.S. warships to New Zealand ports and placed special restrictions on relations between the two militaries. They were not allowed, for example, to visit Camp Smith, USCINCPAC Headquarters, because of this difference of opinion. If our ships could not visit there, they could not visit us. The New Zealand nuclear question was an important one.

While I was at USCINCPAC, the Sommers report was issued. This was a report that was written by an independent, New Zealand study group that did an extensive survey of U.S. nuclear warships and the amount of radiation leakage or potential radiation leakage for ships in harbor. Of course, the position of opponents in New Zealand was, if they allowed American nuclear ships to come in, their harbors were going to be polluted. Besides, they reasoned, they would become a target for anyone who wanted to throw missiles at U.S. forces. The crux of it was nuclear pollution.

The Sommer's report found that there was pollution in New Zealand harbors, but it was from hospitals, the offal of radiation labs, the trash that was routinely tossed into the water. It was determined that the nuclear active residue from hospital gowns and things that were used in their radiation labs was the only detectable source of radiation in the harbor. They went down to other harbors in the world where nuclear ships were present and could

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find no evidence of nuclear radiation. So, in fact, their greatest source of pollution was themselves. However, they still maintained, "Yes, but..." And our nuclear policy trouble continued.

New Zealanders were invited to come along on the SEAS symposia as one of the first indications of a softening of the U.S. stand against relations with the New Zealand military. It was a low-key way to send a message. It took some wrangling on the part of the CINC to get the policy straightened out so we could get permission to have them actually at Camp Smith. In previous years prior to the nuclear standoff, New Zealanders actually worked at Camp Smith as part of the ANZUS group.

The SEAS program did have a lot of difficulties, however, most of them made in the USA. I mentioned before the problems with Japan and Korea in terms of other commands. When we moved from place to place, we relied on the local commands to support us. For example, we have a Status of Forces agreement with Japan, and under that agreement, there are very explicit rules on who can use what. As usual, we tried to keep costs to a minimum and reduce the cost of the trip whenever possible. Staying downtown in a Tokyo hotel is very expensive, about \$200 a night per person. If we could put them in a U.S. military R&R facility, which is mainly for U.S. forces, it would cost us \$70 a night. We calculated that this would save the American taxpayer about \$12,000 on each trip. So, I immediately asked the U.S. Forces/Japan to allow us to put them in the Sanno Hotel, the R&R hotel in downtown Tokyo. We also had asked the local command for a bus to pick us up on arrival at Narita and take us to the hotel. That was fine, I was told, the Air Force had a bus that could pick the group up at the airport. Where did we want to go? "To the Sano Hotel." "You can't go there." "Why not?" "You are not allowed to." "Sure we are, we are all military." Well, Americans could go there, Koreans could go there, but all the other folk were not allowed under the Status of Forces agreement, since not all of them qualified under the provision allowing those who were part of the UN command forces from Korea.

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In an attempt to square that circle, I got the Japanese Foreign Ministry to express an opinion about the use of U.S. R&R facilities for the SEAS group and was told that the Foreign Ministry had no objection and would not protest under the Status of Forces Agreement. But I couldn't get the old stick-in-the-mud American forces to understand the perspective on this. We had to come up with \$12,000 additional American tax payers' money to pay for nothing but the bureaucratic concerns, I guess, of the local U.S. Forces' Japan command. We never got to use the Sanno Hotel, and that was too bad. As far as I know, this is still the case. There was the fear that someone in the Japanese ministry would take offense, and they would have an issue and they didn't want an issue. We had asked the U.S. Embassy to be involved, the foreign ministry to be involved, Japanese Self-Defense Forces people to be involved, and all expressed the opinion that there would be no problem, but we could not persuade our own military in Japan. That is a good example of the impotence of USCINCPAC in directing actions of the U.S. Forces Japan on matters in which the bureaucracy had a say. If CINCPAC could have simply issued a directive, the matter would have been solved quickly. However, we needed a diplomatic arrangement to make the wheels turn.

In this case, there was insufficient power to force things to move in the direction we wanted. U.S. Forces/Japan, is an independent command. The Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Command could ask, make a request, but he could not insist. The experience was an interesting perspective on how the American military operates. Of course in a critical military emergency, there are other devices to make things come together, but one wondered about the efficacy of such plans in the face of immobility in small matters.

Anyway, Camp Smith is a joint military post. You had a Navy, Marine, Air Force, and Army presence there. So a Foreign Service Officer going into this military mist was interesting. One thing that struck me was the very significant intelligence of a lot of these uniformed people. These were intelligent people. They saw the value of the SEAS program and gave it full support. Fifty percent of the program was paid by the Department of Defense and

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the other half, by USIA. It is an example of how two very dissimilar U.S. agencies can find common ground and cooperate to get something done. I think both agencies benefitted significantly from the program.

Beyond that, the advisor's position in Hawaii was kind of fun for somebody who had been a GI in Japan so many years ago. When I was in Japan, I was a lowly Specialist 4th class on arrival in Hokkaido. To me, Camp Zama was Olympus. The Pacific Command was beyond the imagined heights to me. To sit on the "Bridge" at Pacific Command, being privy to all the meetings, involved in all the goings on, and having the ear of the CINC for an old enlisted guy from Hokkaido was a sensation. I had full colonels saying "Yes Sir." to me in the hall. I had a parking space reserved. It said "Director of USIA" which I had a lot of fun with. All the people on the Bridge were called "Directors," so I had the title as well.

I think that shows the decency of the military to take a civilian guy and accord him that kind of civility. They are fine people, and to this day I count them among my real good friends. They are highly dedicated people living under difficult conditions. The housing in Hawaii was miserable. The military are really second class citizens in that state. It was really sad, what was going on. I don't think the Congress really understands. They all talk about supporting the military and they are great shows at memorials, but when it comes to giving them money so that they can live decently with their families, they are not very good. A lot of the military personnel at the PACOM Headquarters were the cream of the crop and could be successful in whatever they did. They were fine examples of patriotic Americans devoting their professional lives to service.

Q: You left in 1995; where did you go?

YATES: I got involved in something in 1995 that was unique in my Foreign Service career. In May, 1995, I was called and told of a team that was being formed to go to North Korea as part of the liaison office. The caller, Spence Richardson, and I had a brief conversation, but I was not interested at that time. I did not think it was going to be a very pleasant

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situation. North Korea was cold, hostile, and difficult. But the more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea, because it was essentially the last real Foreign Service post available. Even the newly independent states that used to be the Soviet Union were essentially getting down to normal. The most exotic place I could think of was North Korea. I had spent most of my academic and personal professional life centered on Korea and this became a logical destination. I finally agreed to it with a full commitment.

I left then in June, 1995 and came back to Washington. Because I was going to go to North Korea, I could not remain a USIA officer on that detail, so I had to be seconded to the Department of State for the duration of my upcoming tour. I was one of four at the time who were going to be moved to Seoul for a brief wait prior to moving north. There were a couple of more people who were going to be joining us later. The total that would have been in Pyongyang at the time was to be seven, but we only had four in Seoul waiting to go. Initial expectations were that we would have a scant few days in the South Korean capital before entering North Korea, so a certain amount of hustle was in order. I had to get special dispensation to get business class seats on a flight to Seoul, because there were no economy seats and I could not wait without jeopardizing the smoothness of the move. Just about all trans-Pacific seats were taken by participants going to the Women's Conference that was being held in Beijing, and they were transiting through Seoul.

Much preparation had already been completed, and we fully expected that within two weeks, we would be in Pyongyang to open the Liaison Office. It was going to be housed in what used to be the old East German Embassy, which the West Germans still had but didn't need. They almost turned it back, but we asked if we might sublet two floors of the main building from them as office space. We had apartments, office space, and garages in marginally decent enough conditions that we could move in. Needed renovations to the apartment building could be made later, as more families became part of the community. That was all set. We had communications arranged. USIA had bought a computer to be used up there. Although I was going as a State Department officer, obviously I was going to have the portfolio of public affairs while in Pyongyang. To get up to speed for my other

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duties, I had to return to Washington and take the consular course which I had many years before fought hard against. I was going to be essentially the principal “consul” as well as the “framework officer.” In that latter position, I was to oversee compliance with the 1994 framework agreement with the North Koreans in terms of nuclear questions.

My wife and I moved to Seoul anticipating only a short stay, but after arrival, a whole sequence of political and military events occurred to interrupt the progress we had expected. The most dramatic of these was the capture of a DPRK submarine on the east coast of the peninsula. In addition, there were Korean local elections and whether or not the U.S. had a liaison office in the North became an issue. The North Koreans themselves reneged on the agreement they had already initialed providing for a Liaison Office. The agreement stipulated that we would have diplomatic passage across the DMZ with pouches, mail, and a truck driving across the DMZ to support the Liaison Office.

There was little in the way of support for an office in Pyongyang. No communications, no food, and no possibility of some grand local market supplying us. Everything would have to be brought in, including computers, furniture, etc. We were positioning stuff in Seoul at the time. When my wife and I moved to Seoul, we packed up a few things for the trip and placed all the rest of our household belongings in storage. When we arrived in Seoul, we had nothing but suitcases of clothing and what is called a “welcome kit” that embassies usually provide to people for temporary use until their household effects catch up. We set up housekeeping in a temporary apartment while we waited to go North. It could be days or as much as two weeks. It turned out to be longer than two weeks. For the interim period until the details of the exchange of Liaison Offices could be sorted out, our small group was placed in “North Korean Study” at FSI. So I had to become a language student again. That was okay, I thought, since I could brush up my rusty Korean. At FSI, we sat, never quite full language students, since our attention was focused on the final move north, but neither did we have regular positions. It was a limbo that was to extend seemingly forever.

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I finally got to the North through a program which the Department of Energy was operating with private contractors to assist the North Koreans in putting the offending nuclear fuel into canisters. If you recall, as part of the 1994 Accord, we agreed to supply North Korea with heavy fuel oil to offset the energy loss because of their agreement to take the reactor that was considered dangerous off line. That reactor was capable of producing a nuclear fuel that might be reprocessed into bomb grade material. As a result of the 1994 accord, the North Koreans would shut down the “research” reactor in return for the provision of heavy fuel oil from the U.S. and the eventual construction of two new “light water” reactors, because they were considered much less capable of producing the dangerous material.

The North Koreans had removed the reactor's fuel and had stored it in a pool next to the reactor building. That separate building had a large water-filled pool about 15 feet deep where the spent nuclear fuel was kept in baskets at the bottom. The rods were just stuck in these baskets like pick-up-sticks and dropped into the water. That was how the fuel was kept in temporary storage before it could be removed to another site for disposal. The problem was, those spent fuel rods had to be controlled. The IAEA had a team on the site, monitoring the fuel in the pool. The reactor was no longer working, but the problem was putting this stuff into sealed, controllable canisters which the U.S. government agreed to assist North Korea with as part of the settlement. The South Koreans were going to build these two new less dangerous reactors for the North Koreans, but they had to get these things off line right away. So the U.S. Department of Energy had contracted with a team of U.S. engineers to help the North Koreans clean up the excess radioactivity at the site and pick up the spent fuel rods from the bottom of the pool and place them in canisters. Those canisters were then to be sealed with IAEA seals and put into racks in the bottom of the pool until the two new reactors came on line and the nuclear fuel could be moved out of North Korea and disposed of.

You may recall that North Korea had threatened to leave the international Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty to which it was a signatory. If it had done so, it would have been under

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no obligation not to reprocess the spent fuel into nuclear weapons grade material. This might then be fitted to the missiles being separately developed and give the North Koreans the ability to market the dangerous product to whomever came up with the price. Naturally, the fear was that one of the “rogue” states of the Middle East would be a ready buyer. Such an eventuality would have jeopardized the uneasy relationships in that unstable part of the world and injected a nuclear component into that situation.

Therefore, it was imperative that the dangerous spent fuel be placed in a safe storage area under the supervision of the IAEA. Since there was no American Embassy in Pyongyang, there was no protection for the American engineers going in to work on the storage project. At the urging of the Department of Energy, the Department of State agreed to supply a diplomatic escort. Since North Korea is a signatory to the Geneva and other diplomatic conventions, they felt this gave a measure of protection to the group, because there would be somebody who was protected by those conventions and who could then blow the whistle on any kind of problems that might have occurred. The assumption was that if one or several of the Americans got into trouble or was simply charged with wrongdoing, they would have no consular protection while so far from U.S. diplomatic missions. So I and the others on the team we had in Seoul, and a variety of other diplomats in Washington and in East Asia began the “circuit-riding” tasks of escorting U.S. engineers into North Korea through Beijing and at the nuclear site at Nyongbyon (it is spelled Yongbyon by South Koreans). We did this on a rotational basis. Each would go in for two to three weeks, with the travel on either end adding another week.

Q: You were working out of Beijing then?

YATES: No, I was working out of Seoul. It was an interesting concept, because the North Koreans are so prickly about anything that deals with the South. Yet they agreed to this arrangement. They knew what was going on. They knew where we came from, as we had made no attempt to hide our southern residence. But the big problem was getting enough Korean speakers to go in. It was not a popular thing for people to do. Some

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would be intrigued by the opportunity to enter a country that was different, even exotic, and the chance to go where so few outsiders had trod was generally exciting. But their ardor quickly cooled when they discovered the living conditions at the nuclear site and the dangers that were involved, not only from the North Koreans in a security sense, but because the site offered radiation threats that were not under the same safety controls common in the U.S. and elsewhere. The North Korean technology to deal with matters of health and safety at the site were not as sophisticated as they would have been in other regions.

However, the North Koreans are very good engineers, and from my conversations with our engineers, most held very positive impressions of their skills and safety consciousness. They didn't have much in the way of equipment, but they were very sophisticated in their craft. That, I think, gave rise to a certain degree of mutual respect that over a period of time was very positive.

On the other hand, the North Koreans are very difficult to deal with. On my first trip into North Korea, I was surprised to find that the conditions there and the attitude of the people was remarkably similar to what I had found in the deepest part of South Korea on my first tour many years before. I had been in Kwangju in the late '60s, and the South then was more advanced than the North is today. Yet North Korea had problems of a magnitude not seen at the time in the South. When I began to travel to the North, the controversy had already begun about the failed crops and the threatening famine. Flooding had already occurred before my first visit. So when I went in, part of what I had to do was look to see if I could gather some insight into what was happening in the North. I traveled from Pyongyang to Nyongbyon where the reactor site is located. It is about sixty miles north of Pyongyang. At the time I arrived, we had to take back roads to get there, and it took about three and a half hours of driving over very poor roads. North Korea must import all of its oil, so they chiefly use cement on the roads. Cement is a local product. They also have severe winters. Anybody who lives in New England would have recognized the damage

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done to cement sections of road from frost heaves. The road was all broken up in places, and it really made a hard, difficult ride.

We would spend from two to three weeks in Nyongbyon, drive back to Pyongyang with the rotating engineering crews and then fly back to Seoul via Beijing. You could not get to North Korea directly from Seoul, and there was no other service except from Moscow. I guess that was only once a week. So the two flights a week, on Tuesdays and Saturdays to and from Beijing, were the best way to get in and out. You were very, very isolated. Communications were not very good. Telephones worked sometimes, and if you were in the Koryu Hotel in Pyongyang, things were not too bad, but if you were in Nyongbyon, telephone communication was very difficult.

IAEA had a guest house there which was built for their needs by the North Koreans. There are IAEA members who stay there on rotational duty monitoring the nuclear site. They also revolve in and out on a similar schedule of two to three weeks each time. There is always an IAEA representative present to monitor the nuclear site, including the reactor from which the fuel was removed.

When I first arrived, there was no real connection between the IAEA people and the American engineers, although after a while, that dissolved a bit, because they were living in the same spot; in such a unique and closed environment, after a while you get to know each other. But officially, we were not supposed to talk to each other or associate, because it was thought any warmth shown by Americans toward the IAEA people would indicate to the North Koreans that the IAEA was a handmaiden of American policy. We were bending over backwards to be cool and distant from these IAEA representatives who were usually third world people from Mexico, Nigeria, Egypt, and places like that. The guest house, itself, wasn't bad. Actually the food there was much better than it was in Pyongyang at the hotel. They had a cook who was able to get fair quality materials from somewhere, possibly China. Everybody was paying hard currency, and probably we were able to get anything we wanted. Nevertheless, the cook at the guest house did a marvelous job of

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creating what his vision of Western food was. He obviously had a cookbook somewhere, because he would come up with amazing things. Some of his creations tasted a little different, but others were really quite good, almost at a gourmet level. The fixings were not dependable, however. Sometimes there were good mushrooms, a variety of vegetables, and lots of chicken. The trouble was, when he found something fresh, you ate it for a week. We had cucumber salad every time, all the time I was there. If he found some tomatoes, you had tomato things; if he had onions, there were onions in just about everything you ate. Breakfasts were not very good, and of the three daily meals, the American breakfast is not very well understood in the rest of the world. There was no orange juice or special items like that. You could bring in your own fixings or condiments, but you could not bring in perishables, because you never knew when you were going to get in.

The rotating engineers would bring candy, M&Ms, Snickers, and favorite snack foods to keep up the sugar levels that were generally low in Korean cooking. You could bring in material to read, but you couldn't leave it in places where North Koreans would be able to see it. If one or another of the North Korean managers at the rest house came across something offensive, they would confiscate it and argue with you and tear it up in front of your face or demand that you store it away; otherwise you would be accused of attempting to propagandize the people of the North. By general agreement, however, the engineers were allowed to do almost anything on the second floor of the guest house where most of the rooms were. The situation even improved to the point where they were able to borrow a videotape machine from the IAEA people and bring in some movies, although sometimes those got into trouble if the subject matter was deemed inappropriate. The only available recreation at the guest house was a pool table and a lonely basketball hoop outside. If you wanted to use that, you had to bring your own basketball.

The guest house was on a corner outside the nuclear city. The old city of Nyongbyon is a small walled town, one of North Korea's oldest settlements. The only industry there, is a silk factory which recently had not been selling much silk. The town was poor. Arriving

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at the site, you had to drive through the town, cross the river, and then approach a whole new city, also called Nyongbyon, on the other side of the Nine Dragons River, after which the guest house is named. The new city is not walled in like the old but is surrounded by barbed wire and several rings of guards. There were a series of security areas, one within another, sort of like those nested Russian dolls. In the center of these zones is the nuclear building and reactor. Around that was a military compound. It resembles a treed college campus. It had been built in the early seventies to be the North Korean nuclear research center.

The North Koreans brought in a lot of their researchers who evidently were trained abroad, probably in Eastern Europe, and who essentially stayed in this compound. They were kept apart from their own society. Their life-style distinguished them from their compatriots in other parts of the country. For example, almost all of their houses and apartments had television antennas sprouting from the roofs. That could not be seen in other areas apart from the special cadre housing in Pyongyang. Inside the secure city, they had their own factories which processed food from their own farms. They even had a Korean rice wine factory. They had begun construction on a new cultural center for films and art. Most of what they needed to exist was provided within the compound. There were schools for the children and playgrounds. Connections with the surrounding communities seemed tenuous. There was a bus that ran through the guard posts, but few people other than soldiers seemed to ride it. Most appeared to be farm people going to fields outside the perimeter. Yet despite its isolation, it appeared to be a fairly sophisticated town compared to the other cities that could be seen while traveling back and forth to Pyongyang.

As a foreigner at this unusual city, there were special disadvantages. As a foreigner, you could not live within the city. That would have created too many problems. So they built a guest house outside the security perimeter, near the Nine Dragons River on a bluff. Behind the guest house was a military installation and in front was the river and the guards. At night time, you could go out of the house, but you couldn't walk very far. You could walk down to a big tree where Kim Il Sung had once stopped to give "guidance" to the people

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and then return, as long as the round trip was done during daylight. In the winter with long work days and short periods of daylight, that meant that there was little opportunity for exercise. It was like being in prison. When you came back, they closed the gate behind you. It wasn't locked, but there was an armed guard at the gate holding you in. There were rice fields around you. There was not much of anything to do at all.

If you wished to be by yourself for a while, you were permitted to climb to the top of the small bluff behind the guest house and look over the river. It was pretty. There was a bench up there that you could sit on. But that was the extent of the recreational facilities. On the second floor landing was a pool table where the North Korean staff were permitted to go. It was the only point where some sort of social contact was allowed with the North Korean staff at the house. I am not really sure that it really had official blessing, but outside of a television set in the lower lobby, which never seemed to carry much programming, there was not much for our North Korean minders to do either. Several of the North Koreans got very involved in playing pool, and the friendly games got very competitive. If too many Americans got involved, however, the North Korean staff became uncomfortable and usually left.

The process involved with the “minders” is one of the aspects of living in North Korea that is kind of controversial. If you read journalist accounts of North Korea you will see a lot of commentary on the watching and “minding” that goes on with foreigners.

North Koreans have a bad reputation, sometimes it is well deserved, of closing people in. Americans always seem to enjoy a sense of conspiracy. This often leads to dramatic exaggerations of the North Korean suspicions. For example, I was told they will not allow me to walk outside the hotel, and you are controlled and watched every waking moment of the day. There will be cameras in your room and the halls. Indeed, there are large mirrors built into the walls in the halls of the hotel we were in, and it is likely, as it is in Beijing, that halls and public areas are monitored. We always seemed to be placed on the same floors of the Koryu hotel, although this could have easily been explained by the relative lack of

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other customers and the high cost of fuel to heat in the winter. Indeed, when there was a sudden flush of visitors and we had to take alternate rooms, the rooms were usually cold and not made up as well.

On the first night of my initial entry into Pyongyang, I decided to get some air after the long trip to Pyongyang and take a walk. The minders congregate in the lobby of the hotel near the front door, the only way out. Mine intercepted me and said, "Where are you going?" "Well, I am going to take a walk." "You can't do that," he responded. "Why not?" "You could hurt yourself, it is dark." I was adamant and a bit stubborn perhaps, because I had been told I would be restricted and wanted to test the theory. "Well, it is not too dark, and I only want a short walk," I claimed. "I will just go out and walk a couple of blocks." My minder insisted that I stay in the hotel - "it is not advisable." Finally, I got them to agree if someone went along with me. I thought that was a reasonable compromise. Off we went, myself and two guides, or minders. It turned out they were right. It was really dark. There are no street lights even in the center of Pyongyang, and the only light you had was an occasional passing car - and they were very occasional. To make things worse, the sidewalks are not in very good repair. There are potholes, cracked concrete, and things to stumble over and break your head on. You could walk into a tree and not even see it. It was really dark. People who are accustomed to cities do not understand how dark it can really be in a city if there are no lights. Perhaps a country boy who grew up under the stars might scoff, but in a polluted city there are no stars to guide one.

It was after 8:00 p.m., but since I was hungry, I invited my stalwart but stumbling minders to go with me to a restaurant where we might get something to eat. I got only a worried response that everything was closed. Naturally, I disbelieved, thinking they just wanted to get me back to the controlled hotel, but after stumbling around a few corners, I began to become a convert. Maybe they really knew more about Pyongyang after dark than I was ready to allow. Yet I still wanted to try to find something. They thought a restaurant down the street might still be open. We stumbled off in the dark, made it to the restaurant, and

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indeed, it was closed. We had to stumble back to the hotel, and I ended up with them in the lobby bar, buying them a beer.

The point of that little story is that, in fact, the guides probably had my best interests in sight. It was dangerous for an American to go stumbling around in the dark. First, you probably would get lost and, second, you could really hurt yourself. Should you bring harm to yourself stumbling about in an unfamiliar city in the dark, they would be blamed for your misfortune. So reports of the deviousness of the “minders” are exaggerated and may be misleading. Of course, they want to keep track of you and do not want you fraternizing with people.

In addition, there is the myth of the “Potemkin Village” demonstration for VIP guests. Foreign accounts of travel in Pyongyang are replete with vignettes of stores stocked, but not open, and activities ostensibly only for the benefit of curious foreigners. No doubt, there are some restaurants and other establishments that are off limits. For example in Pyongyang, there are some department stores which will take foreign currency, reputedly for the convenience of tourists and foreign diplomats, and others that will only take the local currency. But there are a number of other stores, ostensibly closed, that will accept foreign currency despite the confusing instructions about restrictions. So the confusion about restrictions does not make much sense. Walk into any one of the several “foreign” department stores that are for foreign currency, and they are packed with North Koreans. Many of them are just looking around, but some people are buying and carrying things out of the store. The bottom line is that a lot more observation is needed before conclusions can be drawn.

I wanted to go to department store #1 and was told it was off limits for foreigners. But it was featured in North Korean tourist brochures, and I wanted to get some souvenirs to take back to the South. That seemed to be the convincing argument, because I went several times to department store #1, sometimes with groups of American engineers in tow. I went through all its floors. They had a whole corner of the store devoted to stuffed

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animals and birds and oddities like that. You could buy foreign liquor there and shortwave radios, which I thought was interesting. North Koreans don't have much money. It is not a monetized economy. It is apparent that most of the citizenry are not accustomed to a monetized society. They receive chits for rice, free housing, free education, and free medical care, so they don't need money except for cigarettes and beer, both of which are extremely cheap. You can buy a great big bottle of Asahi beer for about two dollars.

Q: Asahi beer is a good Japanese beer.

YATES: Yes, and the North Koreans love it. It is very cheap, far cheaper than it would be in Japan. It is obviously subsidized. You can buy cheap cigarettes in North Korea also. They make cigarettes. I don't know where they get the tobacco; perhaps it comes from the U.S. via China or Hong Kong. So a foreigner who likes to smoke and likes to drink is in good shape in North Korea. Almost everything else is by chit provided by the government. This means that as a North Korean, you don't need money to exist. It is only for nonessentials that you use money. So their low wages are essentially disposable income.

Another commonly accepted theory is that of the "Potemkin Village." As I noted before, it is claimed that they put on a big show for foreigners. The stores are not really stores. They will have goods stacked up neatly, but nobody ever touches it. You go in and look around, and nobody is there, and as soon as you leave, they close it up. You ride down the street, and you see all these stores, and they are all closed. So there are no stores, nothing for the North Koreans to buy.

That is not quite true. While it would be hard to define North Korea as a consumer society, they run things differently in their society than we do. A store here in the U.S. might open at 10 in the morning and stay open until 10 at night. Not in North Korea. They won't open in the morning. They will open at lunch time which sounds to an American like a crazy system. But as was explained to me, the theory in North Korea is that everybody is a

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worker and after breakfast you go to work. If you opened the stores in the morning, there would be no customers, but at lunch time when there is an hour off, there are many people on the street and, sure enough, when I checked at that time, the stores were all open. These goods are all lined up neatly in the morning, because the workers have nothing to do but make them neat until lunchtime when they sell them and then afterwards straighten them all up again.

Perhaps the stores are not crowded as we would expect in our own society, but you do see people standing in line in front of stores waiting to get in. The stores in North Korea are operated, as we would recognize in the old days, as general stores where you walk up to a counter and say, "I want a sack of flour, some lard, and crackers." They then go and get your flour, lard, and crackers and pass them across a counter in exchange for your money. That is the way stores operate in North Korea. You stand in line to get to the counter. When you get to the counter, you order what you want and you take it home. It is a little different than the walk-around-the-supermarket-with-a-cart experience we have. Foreign observers, glancing at the empty stores on their way from the airport to the hotel and back, are not learning much about the system.

A second myth that turned out to be fiction was that there are no such things as gas stations in North Korea. You can ride around Pyongyang for hours without seeing a gas station. The reason is, North Koreans think gas stations are dirty, which I guess has some point to it, and they put them down back alleys. Sure enough, once you know the code, you ride down a street and see a little blue sign up in the corner with a little arrow on it. That is the petrol sign. You go down that alley, and the station is in the back somewhere. There are very few cars anyway, although the numbers are growing. I was in a traffic jam in Pyongyang only once. They have mostly Russian and East European bloc cars, although a fair number of Volvos, which is interesting, and a lot of Mercedes. The North Koreans or someone in North Korea deemed the Mercedes as the best car in the world and decided to build them. So for a time, there was a North Korean Mercedes that was being built. The products of that effort look like Mercedes, except that there is a five-

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pointed star on it instead of the usual Mercedes three-pointed star. The five-pointed star, of course, is their red star. The paint tends to be runny, and the wheel covers tend not to be the magnesium type that you are familiar with. So it is a little different, but looks like a shabby Mercedes about ten years old. I don't think they are making them anymore.

I know they never paid for the Volvos. That is one of the problems with the North Koreans; they buy things and never pay for them. When I was there, they had a Swedish delegation trying to arrange for the payment of about \$350,000 worth of Volvos that the Swedish taxpayers had paid for, because their government had guaranteed the export arrangement. Volvo got its money, but the Swedes did not. The Swedish government is trying to recover it. That is one of the problems with the North Korean economy; they do not have any money. Because it is a non-monetized economy, they do not benefit from the multiplier effect in the economy. If the multiplier effect is not working, then money is not being generated as it moves through the economy. Without generating money they can't buy anything. So it is a "catch 22."

Our U.S. engineers would go in, in groups of about eight and usually a head engineer or the vice president of the company. There were several U.S. companies involved under contract with the Department of Energy. In fact, all of my expenses and escort expenses were funded by the Department of Energy. I was a USIA officer, working for the Department of State being funded by the Department of Energy. It was a strange arrangement.

But we would go in, if we could get in. One of the problems of getting into North Korea was that you had to have a visa, but North Korea doesn't give visas like normal governments; they give you a piece of paper with your picture on it, which they stick inside your passport. But even that wasn't good enough to get you into security places. For example in Nyongbyon, we had to get a separate pass to allow us to get through the different parts of the guard structure - the municipal guards (police), the local army guards, and the security apparatus around the nuclear center itself. When I arrived for the first time in the fall of

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1995, army troops occupied mounted machine gun nests at the access points around the compound of the nuclear city. By my third visit, about a year later, those emplacements had been removed, and there did not seem to be much of an explanation why. Security in the nuclear compound had appreciably diminished.

Still, every time you went in and came out, you had to stop at every guard point, and there were four of them to go through to get into the reactor site. Every morning, we would have to go through the four posts. If you went back for lunch, you had to go through all four posts to reach the guest house outside the perimeter. Going back to work meant going through the four posts again. You had to come to a full stop and show all your documents at each stop, every time you went in or out. They didn't inspect the drivers or the guides. The drivers had a very unique position. First, they commanded the cars, but they also probably had more authority than drivers would in other parts of the world, because they were part of the intelligence establishment.

Q: Probably like the proverbial KGB chauffeur, Colonel Chauffeur. Something like that.

YATES: Yes, that is right. By the time of my second trip, they had opened a new highway, a four lane limited access highway which ran past Nyongbyon up to Myohyangsan, which is a tourist site. That's where the Kim Il Sung memorabilia exhibition containing the gifts the former "Great Leader" received from foreign guests are on display. It resembles an airport gift shop in other parts of the world, in the sense that the selection of gifts is undifferentiated, ranging from the truly artistic to the banal.

When the drivers took their charges back and forth on this new highway and reached the crest of a hill, they would coast, which wasn't a good idea in a power steering equipped car. Remember in the '40s when there was a gas shortage because of the Second World War, people would coast. My father would do that to conserve gas. In the same manner, when the North Korean drivers would get to the top of the hill, they would shut the engine off, coast down to the bottom, and restart the engine. Sometimes, they would simply put

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the car in neutral and then back into gear at the bottom. Their belief, I suppose, was that they were saving gasoline. There was a great deal of debate in the American press about the lack of fuel in North Korea. The claim was that the North Koreans were running out of fuel. I never saw any evidence of that in specific terms. There were cars, trucks and buses all over the place. The buses were empty most of the time, but the trucks usually were carrying military people or people going to the fields; they carried very little produce.

You could see ox carts still hauling brush for fuel. North Korea was still very much a third-world country. They were cutting off the branches of the trees in the country side to about eight feet high, so the tree wouldn't be killed but the lower branches could be used for fuel. There were deforested places, but elsewhere, they were being smarter. They knew there was going to be more than one year of famine, and if they cut the tree down for use this year, next year they would really be cold, because there would be no trees left. So they lopped branches off at the bottom.

They were using the ice in the winter time along the rivers to take sleds to parts of the terrain that were inaccessible by road or path. They would use the sleds to go up the river and cut the branches off trees lining the banks of the river and drag them along the ice back to the villages and homes.

Q: What was the period of time that you were making these trips?

YATES: From when I was assigned to Seoul in August 1995 until late 1996 when I returned to the US. About a year and a half.

Q: How many trips did you make?

YATES: I made three trips. The total time I spent in North Korea was about two months.

Q: Were you being debriefed when you came back?

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YATES: Yes and no. I obviously reported in cable form when I got back, but a formal debriefing, no.

Q: Were you there during the death of Kim Il Sung?

YATES: No, I was there after that. However, I was there during the 50th anniversary of the Party. The problem at Nyongbyon was that there was nothing for the engineers to do, so we tried to figure out things that might provide some recreation. They worked on Saturdays, so it meant only Sundays were free. We could take a car and drive to Pyongyang. We could go to the hotel, get a room, and sit in the bar. It was at least a change of scenery, and there were sights to see.

One of the weekends on my first trip on October 10, 1995 was the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Korea Workers Party. Some of the guides knew we were interested in doing some touring and asked whether we would like to see the show, if they could get us some tickets. Most of the engineers thought that was a great idea. I told the guides that, if we could be given firm assurances that we were not going to be put into a compromising position, that we wouldn't go to any of the places we otherwise would not go to like the memorial to Kim Il Sung, for instance, we could probably go. However, if anything happened that I thought was wrong, then I would take the engineers out immediately. We would stand up and leave, possibly embarrassing our hosts. If they understood the conditions and understood that we would walk out if compromised, we would accept the offer to see the show.

Off we went. It turned out that the apparatus in North Korea is not very well put together. It is a small country but incredibly bureaucratic. The guides had lots of trouble getting us tickets, but we were finally given admission tickets to the foreigners' stand for the ceremony at the Kim Il Sung Square in the heart of Pyongyang.

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We left about 7:30 a.m. and got to the square around 7:50. There were no seats, just wide flat concrete areas, arranged amphitheater style, flanking the platform where the leadership stood to wave at the masses below. On one side was the Party cadre, and on the other side, the military, and below that, the foreigners' stand for ambassadors and people from embassies on the right hand side of the podium. So we got shunted off to the right. I had dark glasses on and a hat. The only way you could tell I was a foreigner was because I was differently dressed than the rest of them. But you couldn't tell who I was. Our instructions to the engineers were not to associate or talk with people, to just watch, no politicking.

There were a lot of diplomats there, Bulgarians, Russians, etc. We were also put together with the Party faithful from abroad: the northern Chinese who are adherents of the communist way and some Japanese from the Japanese communist party who had come for the celebration. We were all together, milling about. Things started to move at 8:00 in the morning and lasted until almost noon. It was hot, and it was long. However, it probably was the most spectacular thing I have ever seen in my life. All the citizens of Pyongyang were spread out before us.

We had one representative of the institute managing the project for the Department of Energy who was not interested in the show. He was a jogger and said that he was going to jog. The guides became very upset. "What do you mean, you are going to jog? You can't jog." The DOE rep was adamant. "I want to jog." "You can't jog," responded the guides. "Why not?" insisted the American. "Because you will be arrested if you do." "I am an American and can go anywhere I want," he persisted. "No, you can't. Nobody in Pyongyang can go anywhere they want. The city is shut. Anybody who lives in this city will be at the square by order. You don't have an option. Anybody not in the square this morning will be arrested, you included." So very reluctantly, he was dragged along with the rest of us. The celebration consisted of about half of the people of Pyongyang in a parade with floats and cheering members of work units. The other half of the citizenry was in the

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square waving plastic flowers, red and pink and some yellow. They choreographed these flowers into signs and symbols. Whenever they mentioned Kim Il Sung, they showed the sun. Whenever they mentioned Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung's son, there would be a star. The parade of silk banners was a marvelous thing to see.

The first thing in the morning was a formation of the military, which filled the square. The military leadership made speeches. They had just appointed four new marshals in the North Korean command, so those marshals were there and reviewed the troops in these very long black Zivs, big Russian cars, and a Lincoln and a couple of other Western cars. They rode in circles, reviewing the troops, and then the troops marched off. There was no brandishing of arms. Few of the assembled troops had arms at all. After the troops had marched out of the square, the mass of citizens who were "hanging in the wings" behind the buildings flooded into the square in this mass of pink. The women were dressed in a modified, shorter, version of the traditional Korean Hanbok and the men wore suits and ties. It was quite an amazing show. This continued until all had arrived at their proper place, and then the parade started.

After the military speeches and the review of the troops, Kim Jong Il came in, no more than 50 feet from where I was standing. He leaned over the edge of the baluster there and waved at all the foreigners. We were told that no pictures were allowed, and all of us respected the request. But it was remarkable to see him so close. He didn't look as sick or disheveled or as monarchical as he does in some of the Western press photos. He went off to receive the accolade of the crowd and stood there for hours, waving. He did evidence considerable boredom, and perhaps it is understandable, given that the parade went on for almost four hours and everyone had all eyes on him.

After Kim Jong Il arrived, the parade started. There were thousands of people with floats, lots of silk flags. After the four hours standing on the cement flats, we were impressed but relieved that the marathon was over. We were told we were going to take a break for lunch and then in the afternoon were the gymnastics. We went back to the hotel for

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lunch and then went out to the Kim Il Sung Memorial Stadium where just about all of the student population of Pyongyang was assembled. They did marvelous things with card flipping. They would make entire pastoral scenes and then a picture of Kim Il Sung, and then a picture of his son, a lot of slogans and things. Hundreds of these were done by all these school kids about 13, 14, 15 years old under direction from the ground. They had cheerleaders down there. I do not remember seeing more than one or two mistakes made in the several hours of constantly changing pictures. There were thousands of these kids.

After the sloganeering and marvelous pictures of the card flippers, the gymnastics started with an incredible display. I had seen a fair amount of Chinese gymnastics while stationed in Beijing, but the kids in the stadium gave nothing to the Chinese in their display of skills. Much of the display ran with multiple activities in different parts of the stadium simultaneously, a "multiple ring circus" that somehow all fit together into a seamless whole. People tumbling in the air, ground vaulting, and all sorts of juggling, all taking place at the same time. Kim Jong Il was there also. We were seated further away. We certainly weren't given very special consideration up in the stands, off on the side. We could take all the pictures we wanted of the gymnasts, but couldn't turn the cameras on the leadership podium.

Our minders carefully observed the ground rules of our attendance. The extent to which the minders were careful about the instructions I had laid down before we had agreed to go, was illustrated during the morning celebration. The TV cameras were constantly roving over the crowds and the displays of adulation, but during a lull in the celebration, began to pan across the crowd of foreigners, obviously showing the foreign dignitaries who were attending the celebration. At the time the camera came very close to where I was standing, one of the minders saw it coming and stepped between me and the camera and stood there until the camera left. I wouldn't have cared so much, because with my hat and sunglasses, nobody would be able to tell me from any other European, but nonetheless,

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the point was, he kept his word which was much more important to me than any possible photography.

I found all the way along that the North Koreans were very careful about the agreements that were made. If the agreements were broken, either they had a very good reason, or they did not feel they themselves had broken them. We had one incident during my first visit when I wanted to visit the East German compound to see the Swedish representative who handled American affairs in Pyongyang at the time. I wanted to meet him, say hello, and set up procedures to be used if we had problems in Nyongbyon. Because the Swedes provided some diplomatic protection, the assistance of this Swedish representative could be invaluable in times of emergency. It was getting dark, but that was not of concern to me. I said that I wanted to take the car and go over and see the Swedish consul. My minder of the moment said, "Does he expect you?" I said, "No, but I would like to knock on his door and say hello." "Well, it may be a problem." "Why?" "Well, we don't know where the German Embassy is." That was one of the largest embassies in Pyongyang and our foreign minders didn't know where it was? That was unbelievable. I said, "I really have to go. I want to do this." "We will see what we can do," was the response.

It was about 4:30 in the afternoon, and it gets dark in Pyongyang in the winter time pretty early. They worked for half an hour and then came back and said, "We can't find it. We have called the foreign ministry, and we just can't locate the German compound." I said, "Well, what are we going to do?" They suggested that we take the car and try find it, so we all piled into the car I had rented and rode off into the mists of Pyongyang. We crossed the river into the diplomatic quarter where we stopped here and there, asking security guards where the East German Embassy was. In Seoul, I had seen a map with the general location of where it was but had nothing else to guide us. We took a few wrong turns but eventually did find the place. By that time, it was dark and there was a guard out in front. I got out of the car, a Westerner, and approached the gate. "Who are you and what do you want?" I was asked. "I want to see the Germans." The guard's response was

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a simple, "Okay." My minders had to stay in the car, since they were not allowed to go into the embassy, but I could.

I had one of the engineers with me, and the two of us went into the compound which was already completely dark. We felt our way along and saw a light in an apartment building toward the back. Europeans don't keep hall lights on very often to conserve energy. We went up some stairs and banged on a door with light showing under it. I don't know what the occupants thought, I never did find out, but they came to the door; getting a bang on the door in the middle of the night in North Korea from people you don't expect must be quite sensational. It turned out they were newly arrived, a young German diplomat and his wife. Nobody that I wanted to speak with was at home, so it was not a very successful visit. But at least I had gotten into the compound, met somebody, and gotten back out. The important part of the story is that my minders worked very hard to locate the German compound when they could have made their lives a lot easier by simply denying that we were able to go. They were really embarrassed that they did not know where the compound was, when first asked. The North Korean bureaucracy is very compartmentalized, and as I gradually learned more about that unusual government, I more fully understood why my minders had such a problem.

I have another tale that also speaks to the purposes of the minders. When I was getting close to leaving North Korea after my first trip, I wanted to take some kind of candy back to Seoul as a souvenir for my instructors at FSI and others in the South. I was unable to find anything suitable. I mentioned this problem to my minders, and they scurried off. Two hours later, they came back and said, "We have checked all over town. The only place we can find to buy something resembling what you want is up in the hotel bar." Sure enough, upstairs in the bar tucked behind the counter were some boxes of candy. It tasted terrible. But nonetheless, that was North Korean candy which I could take back to the South. But they had worked the better part of the morning, trying to locate the source of my desired souvenirs. I think their spirit of conscientiously trying to do something right is pretty strong.

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I later had a different experience while on a negotiating team in my last visit. I was the State Department representative for a negotiating team that was run by the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and headed by Norm Wolfe, an Under Secretary at ACDA, to negotiate some of the final parts of the spent fuel arrangements. The canning operation was ongoing, but there were some problems with the details of the work schedule in the final stages of the canning process. Some of the positions of the North Koreans that we thought did not have any merit turned out to be based on things of which we had no understanding. That happened a number of times in my North Korean experience.

You may remember in the press a couple of years ago, we had accused the North Koreans of siphoning off the fuel oil of the first shipment and diverting it to other purposes. Their tally of how much had been taken in was different from ours. Their's showed less and ours showed more. We said, "Aha!" The press had a field day, saying that they were stealing the fuel.

It turned out that our technology was overly sophisticated and had given us incorrect readings. We used technology utilizing sound waves to measure the flow of the heavy fuel oil, which meant we did not have to put anything into the fuel flow itself. It was an acoustic process by which you could tell the rate of flow by, I suppose, the doppler effects on the reflected sound. The North Koreans were adamant that their figures were correct. They used an old propeller system directly in the flow of the oil. The number of times it went around indicated the amount of fuel flow. What happened, as it turned out, was that the fuel going through the line was at a colder temperature than we expected. Since the acoustic properties of the fuel change under those conditions, we had to re-calculate our own totals. In fact, the North Koreans were right and our figures were wrong, despite all of our high tech equipment. Nonetheless, the American press had made much ado about the possible fraud, but made much less about our foul up of the data.

A second incident of the same kind occurred when the North Koreans wanted to stop work on the canning of the spent fuel. We said, "Ah, dragging their feet." This was a charge

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that was leveled at them regularly. The crane was broken. They had a holiday. Their men were sick. Or the radiation is too much over the pool. They complained that the American engineers were coming and going in the replacement shifts, but their people were staying and working in the same conditions month after month. The American engineers were working 12 hour days, from 8 in the morning until 8 at night over the pool and for them it was all right, because we had these very fancy, and expensive, dose meters, which were cumulative in determining the amount of radiation that an individual was receiving. They assigned one to you on arrival, and you wore it all the time. Additionally, all American engineers were examined with a full body count done periodically to make sure they did not exceed the Department of Energy's standards for allowable levels of radiation exposure.

However, it turned out that the North Koreans didn't have any of that fancy equipment or sophisticated exams. All they had were the film badges which only indicate when too much exposure is received over a brief period. They had nothing showing the actual cumulative exposure. The way they measured total possible accumulated exposure was by taking a Geiger counter and placing the sensor out over the pool containing the spent fuel while taking a reading. A "health physics" technician would then multiply that by the number of hours the crew was above the pool. The problem was, if you do that, you are not taking into account the shielding of the platform and other obstructions from things above and surrounding the pool. Our crew with the dangling badges would have an accurate reading, but the North Korean crew's accumulation estimates were an average based on the sensor reading taken directly over the pool. That meant if an engineer was suspended directly over the pool for that amount of time, that was the amount of dosage they would receive.

Of course, nobody would be suspended directly over the pool for that length of time, because they walk back and forth for tools, take breaks, etc. Our argument was that there was plenty of space for that, but they were adamant that, because of their health concerns, the exposure of their crews over the pool was high. Finally, we got the idea that the only way they had to determine dosage was to assume the maximum. By doing so, it meant

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they were spending too much time over the pool and greatly exceeded Department of Energy standards.

It took a long time to wrangle that down to where we understood what they were talking about. They had a good point, and once it was recognized, we were able to come to an agreement on time to be spent over the pool. Although we were happy to have our engineers in over the pool for longer hours, the Koreans absolutely refused. They said that if we gave them the equipment so they could test in the same manner as we did, then we could talk about it. These things are \$500-\$600 a piece, and we weren't about to start handing them out like cookies to all the Korean workers and people who were in the pool area. But in fact, they were being very careful in a dangerous situation with their people. I think in retrospect it was something very difficult for us to argue with. Their intransigence was not so incomprehensible when you began to understand it from their point of view.

One of our major problems in dealing with the North Koreans was that the Americans did not speak Korean. Even in the negotiations I spoke of, we did not have a translator. The only American who had any Korean language was me. The only place the negotiating team could go to converse was out in the street. We had to call for a recess in negotiations and all trundle downstairs and walk around the block. I would tell Norm Wolfe, the head of the delegation and a lawyer, that they didn't understand what we were talking about. First off, we should not use any legal jargon that is popular in the US, for their translator did not understand it and could not render an accurate translation. My impression was that the translator was guessing a bit and thereby throwing negotiations off the track when our points did not make any sense to the North Korean side. Secondly, the North Korean-supplied translator in translating from Korean into English was doing things that were extremely annoying to Norm Wolfe.

For example, every time they would refer to Wolfe, instead of saying "him" or "you," he would say, "Mr. Norman Wolfe," using his full name. That drove Wolfe crazy, because he thought they were needling him. He was not being needled; it was simply a case of the

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translator trying to be too fussy. The translator was trying to be polite, but he was doing so in a very irritating fashion.

We also saw in the negotiating team an apparent bureaucratic division, almost antagonism, within the North Korean government. The chief negotiator for the North Korean side was an engineer, Director Lee, the Director of the Atomic Energy Bureau, a very senior position in the North Korean government. The North Korean Foreign Ministry was represented by a slick looking gentleman with a silk suit, and clearly not held in the highest regard by the people from the Atomic Energy Bureau. He was a quintessential bureaucrat, one of those Foreign Ministry wonks who just get in the way. He would make caustic speeches, mentioning all sorts of inappropriate and tangential points that would cause Wolfe to get impatient and upset. Obviously, Lee could see that this interloper was causing all sorts of trouble in his negotiation. Actually, there were two foreign ministry representatives, a lawyer who kept his mouth shut most of the time and this other, political type. The talkative representative of the Foreign Ministry was kind of chubby, which was also unusual for a Korean. Those from the Atomic Energy Bureau on the negotiating team were rail thin.

The comparison probably rankled Director Lee. The man in the silk suit would scribble notes all during the negotiations and suddenly rip off a page and pass it to Director Lee. Director Lee was obviously not interested in his scribbled observations, for he would receive the passed notes, hardly look at them, and place them face down on the table beside him. At some time during a break in translation, he would turn up a corner and take a look at the notes and then lay it back face down again. He was doing the absolute minimum to not be completely disrespectful to this person, but certainly not to listen to what he had to say. The man in the silk suit was really upset by this, because he was continually bobbing back and forth in his seat to see what had happened to his brilliant suggestions. You could see him growing visibly ticked off with Lee for not paying attention to his diatribes. It was always the same stuff.

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The failure on our part was that we did not have a competent Korean translator on board who was an American and who would understand what we said, even with the ill-advised legalisms. When Wolfe would use lawyer terms, the translator did not know what he was talking about and would guess. Sometimes Director Lee, whose English was obviously better than he would admit, could straighten things out in his own mind or understood the logical stuff, but many times he could not. This prolonged the negotiations to a considerable extent. Finally, we got to an agreement, although it didn't look like we were going to for a long time. In true North Korean style, they would say "absolutely not, absolutely not," until three seconds before you break and then they would say, "Well, maybe."

One last thing. The North Koreans had put together a welcoming banquet which was very elegant at the hotel. The meal was well served, and it was excellent food. To be polite and respectful, we had to reciprocate. A bunch of Americans in the heart of Pyongyang had few options. We could not have it at the hotel, because the dining rooms were all booked. I took my minders on a field excursion to see if we might find a place suitable for a concluding banquet hosted by the Americans. We ended up in the Diplomatic Club, which is a kind of curious, run-down, end-of-the-road operation across the river in the diplomatic area. I went over to look at the place to see whether or not it could be suitable for our gala affair, but it clearly was not. It was a dump. It didn't smell good, and it was dank and dark. I had visions of eventually spending cold winter nights downing suds at the bar and listening to bad stories from drunk foreigners once we were finally here with the Liaison Office.

We were ushered into a reception room with plastic flowers. It was really more suited for a funeral parlor than for a banquet. But clearly, we had no choice and would have to make the best of it. After some long negotiations, we finally decided on a menu for the banquet. I asked them to make some changes in the room, to take out some of the junk that was useless like the TV sets, plastic flowers, etc. With a heavy heart filled with trepidation I returned to the Koryu Hotel to break the news to the delegation.

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The upshot was, when we had the meal, although it was a little different than many banquets I had been to, it was fairly good. It was, in fact, quite nice in some ways. They had taken out all of the junk and dressed up their waitresses in the North Korean version of the traditional Hanbok. All appeared dramatically different from the polyester-clad bar hostesses I had seen in the afternoon and even the grim room appeared almost cheery. We were brought in through a side entrance, and did not have to walk through the tawdry bar. The North Korean manager did a nice job. Wolfe was obviously pleased, particularly since the total cost came in under the paltry sum available in the ACDA budget. The party was a success and the American taxpayer did well on that one.

By offering that kind of convivial banquet reception, the U.S. side neatly tied up the negotiations on an upbeat note. It really made a difference, because the North Koreans, like their South Korean brethren, really like a good time. They like to drink, to pass the glass around, and play little parlor games, like singing, making speeches, toasts, etc. They got very convivial. These were the hard nosed, brittle negotiators of the earlier afternoon who suddenly now were drinking buddies in the evening. I have heard the same story from academicians and others who have traveled in the North or have had relationships with North Koreans. They take off the official mask, set it aside, have a good time, and put the mask back on the next morning.

I found also one of the great lessons of all this was, if you begin to work with the North Koreans and put aside politics, they become very helpful, very warm, and in some ways very candid. It also means that you can begin to make progress where there was none before. Suddenly doors open. Things are not as much of a problem as they were once thought to be. If they trust you, the whole relationship develops and changes and they begin to rely on you in many ways for counsel on what they should do. It becomes a whole different equation.

Much of our negotiation so far has been handled by people who have no experience in Korea, do not speak the language, and do not know much about Korean history or culture.

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They go in there with their American eyes and American ears, and they hear things that they think are right and in their terms are correct, but are not the facts based on the way that Koreans see them. In turn, the Koreans believe they have been wronged, or worse insulted, but the Americans think it is obvious and they are simply being stiff. In the classic sense, both sides do not understand what the other one is talking about, so we cannot get agreement. I think that has been the crux of our problem with North Korea all along. By the same token, they have the same problem with the Chinese and Japanese. It is not just us, it is everybody. I think if we had the presence of mind to be able to put together negotiating teams that have the language and the culture background as well as the technical expertise required of the negotiations, we would have much greater success with North Korea.

There were a lot of other parts of the North Korean experience that I think are interesting. There were a whole host of observations and things, but I'm not sure they are germane to what you are looking for.

Q: One of the things that you read in the paper about North Korea is the adulation for both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Did that come through to you?

YATES: Oh, sure. I think over the three times I was there, the whole situation changed. I was there in the beginning when there was still the mourning period of Kim Il Sung's death. In the parade given in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Party, for example, Kim Il Sung was at the center, the son was not. Kim Jong Il was mentioned occasionally, and each time, you had a star that would be shown. He is called the star of Paektu San, the sacred mountain up on the border with China where Korean civilization traditionally came from. There is some controversy about that. As a matter of fact, it is known that Kim Jong Il was not born on the flanks of Paektu San but near Khabarovsk when his parents were living there. None the less, everywhere you go in Korea, there are portraits and squares commemorating Kim Il Sung and to some extent, too, Kim Jong Il, his son, but his son was clearly a secondary deity. In each government building, they would have portraits of the

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president, vice president, and council somewhere on the wall. What they would have in the foyer was usually a slogan or something said by Kim Il Sung, or Kim Jong Il, for that matter. When one or the other visited a facility, they would take a quote from the visit and carve it on the wall. This is hallowed ground to them.

Engineers are pragmatic, and it is often bone chillingly cold, so they want to get their work done as quickly as possible. We had a shipment driven in from a port, and they tore it apart getting out tools and equipment. The spent-fuel pool room was getting pretty dense with packing material and equipment, but the space in the foyer was empty. So the Americans put down saw horses and began to disassemble the shipment in the foyer until Chief Engineer Lee, suddenly spotted this and exploded. I was in one of the back rooms and was called out. He demanded, "Do you know what is going on out front?" "No," I responded in surprise and promised to take a look immediately. Of course, they had the whole place covered with trash and equipment was all over the place. He said, "I want you all to understand [meaning us Americans and engineers] that this is an important place to us and the actions of the American engineers is very, very rude. Furthermore, the canning work will not continue until this is straightened out." We had offended their sensibilities. This was like running around without a shirt or pants in church.

Taking the lesson to heart, the American engineers got the place even cleaner after they finished than it was before they started. To their credit, the engineers understood the problem and were helpful in cleaning the place up, even giving the North Koreans wide tape to tape down wires and make the place look better than ever. The North Koreans got over their pique, accepted the apology, and allowed work to resume without apparent grudge.

At another time, we had a crisis of a different sort. We brought in equipment, and it was cold, the winter was coming on, and there wasn't any heat in the building. Once the reactor was shut down, there was no hot water, and with no hot water, there was no heat. The reactor even had been used to heat the entire community. So we had to bring in kerosene

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heaters for the offices where we did the water chemistry and another room that was a sort of commons for the American crews. It was really cold. You haven't really felt cold until you have had to sit in a concrete building in a very cold place for a very long time. Then you feel a depth of cold that reaches into your bones. The engineers had put in an emergency request for space heaters. In good government fashion, the request was put out for the low bid, and after purchase, the new kerosene heaters were air shipped over.

They were fine and serviceable heaters, but they were made in South Korea. Labels on the boxes and on the heaters said "Made in Korea." As soon as we got them out of the packing crates and put them on the floor in the boxes, all the North Koreans disappeared. I got called in again by Chief Engineer Lee and asked him what was the problem. He said, "The problem is, we will not work with those boxes in our building. Burn them, destroy them, but get rid of them. And the heaters as well." I was alarmed. "But we need them; it is cold." We finally arrived at the conclusion that the offence was the "Made in Korea" labels. So we got our jackknives out and went out and cut out of the boxes all of the stamps that said "Made in Korea." We took the stuff out and scraped off all the little "Made in Korea" decals. We examined everything scrupulously to make sure nothing said "Made in Korea." I went back to the Chief Engineer and said, "I think we have solved the problem. Won't you come out and look?" He went out to look and found nothing with the offending "Made in Korea" labels, so all was now acceptable and we got our heat. The fact they had been made in South Korea was not the important thing. It was the fact that they said "Made in Korea," to them taunting our North Korean co-workers.

The same thing happened when the first shipment of rice aid arrived in the northern port. Remember when the North Koreans became exercised over the South Korean flag flying on the back of the ship? That was the same syndrome, only written in a different size. The North Koreans were extremely sensitive to that. Whenever we would drive by car through the center of the nuclear compound of Nyongbyon, like in the city of Pyongyang, there was a Kim Il Sung square with his portrait on a billboard as the centerpiece. All cars were expected to slow down and go at a crawl in front of the portrait. You could then speed up

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(even when crossing in front of the portrait of Kim Jong Il) to continue along to the next check point. That occurred almost everywhere we traveled. It resembles a religion rather than politics or political control. And if you begin to think of it as a religion, you may not become a believer, but you can at least understand it as a religion and then much of what they do becomes understandable.

Kim Il Sung was seen to be a man but revered as a god. Everybody knew he was not god, but nonetheless, he became the symbol of the state, the central image around which the identity of the nation is built. Wherever you traveled around North Korea, there are plaques, pictures, and commemoration tablets that are standing where Kim Il Sung visited and gave "guidance" to the workers of the time. You can laugh at that, but like a good ward politician, he visited every little hamlet in the country. Everywhere you go, there is a plaque where Kim Il Sung stood and gave advice to the farmers or to the workers or the citizens. Wherever he made a pronouncement, there is a picture. There is a wealth of paintings of Kim Il Sung. It is a religion with its own myths and faiths. The images and portraits are the icons of the religion. There is a book of his writings that the believers can cling to. Now, of course, he is dead, and there is the ethereal part of the religion. The son has not, to date, been able to assume the same level of divinity.

I had the chance to watch a fair amount of North Korean television on my several trips north. Since there was not much else to do at the guest house once you tired of pool, it was possible to watch North Korean television. Based on the number of programs I saw, the North Koreans like to show soap opera type programs. This is done all over the world to much the same rapt attention. At least that was the habit of the guest house staff who watched the stories on the one set on the lower floor in the lobby. The most common plot line was usually stories of some hero defending the faith of the party or following the guidance of Kim Il Sung. In fact, they are interpersonal fights, melodramas. We used to enjoy movies with a girl tied up on the tracks, and a speeding train is on the way while a man in a black hat stands by, twirling a handle bar mustache. It is the same stuff all over again. We went through that in the '30s and '40s. They have their villains and usually they

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are rightists, or something like that. There is still the black hat and mustache and the girl tied up on the tracks. It is the same story. The hero has muscles and the chiseled jaw like we used to have. The same stuff. That is what they watch and enjoy. The news shows and documentaries generated only boredom until the next drama.

Like all people, if the North Koreans are given a chance to enjoy something different or exotic, they usually take it. An example of this is taped music played in the cars. Most North Korean music is written in North Korea, of course, with generous nods to themes that coincidentally may have appeared in familiar western music. However, if you are in a car with a driver who got sick of the same stuff all the time, what he plays is tapes which are essentially Western music done by North Korean orchestras. That is acceptable, I guess, because they would have Western music which you couldn't recognize or thought it sounded vaguely familiar but different. Nonetheless, it sounded a lot like what we would recognize as Western classical music. They have a light band which plays on television all the time. They get singers and sing folk songs and things like that. So there is some variety. I bought some of the music. Some of it is very good; Koreans love to sing.

Q: Oh, yes. The South Koreans took to what we could call Western classical music like ducks to water.

YATES: Northerners have many of the same musical traits as their southern brothers. For example, they like opera. You would have baritones and bass singers on television all the time, singing their hearts out. The audience will sing along with them in the concerts. The camera will turn on the audience, and there everyone is singing in the audience too. So you obviously do not go to concerts to listen, you go to participate. You do the same thing in the South. Obviously, they are the same culture and people.

Q: Ken, you went back to Seoul each time, is that right?

YATES: Yes.

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Q: Did you find yourself, with a Korean born wife, etc., as a source of information about North Korea? Were you playing this role when you got back, unofficially, not officially?

YATES: To some extent yes. Officially, too. I spoke to at least one Korean think tank on the subject of North Korea. I took back a videotape. One of the engineers was a camera buff, and he had a video camera with him. When we went to the 50th anniversary show in Pyongyang, he took his camera and lots of tape. He taped for hours, just about the whole thing. So he has most of the parade on tape. In fact, he is selling it now on the Internet for \$30 a copy or something like that. I took this tape with me and showed it at one of the Korean think tanks for a very conservative group of Korean commentators. I got a lot of skepticism on their part about what I had seen. A lot of disbelief by some of them. Others, not so much. I think most Koreans now believe that unification is going to be a slow process, and they actually support that. The cost of unification in the short run will be so much that it would cripple the southern economy, and they don't want to give up their own benefits of the good life, even though they recognize the North needs additional food, especially, and a lot of investment. I believe that the question of the amount of investment that would be needed in North Korea can be a bit overblown. American scholars have made many of the estimates on the cost of unification, perhaps based loosely on the German experience. I went to a conference in Seoul on this question, and we had a number of American economists and political scientists who stood up and started quoting numbers in the billions of dollars as what would be required. There was not much direct explanation of how they got those numbers, but they talked about the necessity of almost a trillion dollars in investments. The southern Korean economy doesn't have that kind of money.

Their point was that, even in Germany when the unification was accomplished with a lot more on the ground investment in the East, the Germans were shocked to find out how much it cost to accomplish reunification and try to bring the East up to some standard that could be acceptable and compatible with the western economy. Their point was that

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the Korean experience would be more expensive, because the disparity between the two countries is much greater. And that is probably true, although I think it underestimates the ability of the northerners to hang in there longer to get their physical requirements met like food and shelter and education. There is a possibility that the larger investment won't be as high, because I think their expectations are lower and will continue to be, despite a closer relationship with the south.

Q: Yes, we really are talking about Koreans who can take an awful lot.

YATES: They have taken a lot. They talk about a famine in the north. It is a famine, but they have had some degree of famine for forty years. It is clear that the communist system they have does not work. There are numerous instances around the world of economic failure in communist systems. This is the last of the breed. They know what failure is. The problem is, will they be able to accept the consequences of that failure in the face of the obvious luxury and wealth of the south at the same time. If the barriers are dropped, what will they do?

The southerners expect them to enter into a mass migration south for jobs. In fact, the South is importing labor now for some of the menial jobs they no longer wish to fill themselves. This is the same kind of thing the Germans had experienced. The question is, would the northerners take these jobs from the foreigners the South were bringing in. Would the southerners also be able to provide the indicated labor force needed for the kind of industries southerners no longer do, like shoes. The south has already moved a lot of its manufacturing base offshore. The investment that went into Korea in the late sixties and early seventies, textile manufacture, shoe manufacture and things like that, are no longer in Korea. Now they are going high tech and much of the stuff they did before has gone off to China or down to Malaysia or Vietnam.

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Q: Did you find yourself being used by the North Koreans because you would be the only one who knew South Korea in this group? Were you feeding their curiosity about South Korea or were they pretty careful?

YATES: They were pretty careful. I think they don't want to talk about it, because that would easily corrupt them in the eyes of their own system. Generally speaking, they did not talk about it much. After a while when you got to know people, you began to get a little bit more of that. You had to be very careful, because if you tried to push it, then they would push you out. So you did not bring it up. If they wanted to talk about it, you would be happy to do so. But you had to be careful. If they wanted to talk about it, they were probably baiting you or something akin to the games the Chinese intelligence service played. But if you backed off a little bit and took a quiet road, I think you built more confidence among them. I had a lot of political discussions with my North Korean handlers. In the beginning, they would all give speeches, particularly if a superior was within earshot. If you ride in a car with one of their superiors next to you, the guide in front would launch into a long tirade against American inequities and the duplicity and colonization of the South, etc. They would get tiresome. More than once, I had this happen to me, but not with the same person more than once. Once they had done it, that seemed to complete a check box in the report they had to file on you. Once you are past that, particularly if you are willing to buy the beer or cigarettes, they are willing to sit down and talk about other things. I had a long conversation once about the American civil war, which North Koreans have virtually no knowledge of.

The guides that we got were not political types; they were technical people. It was a strange thing. Political types never studied English, technical types did, because it was a language that allowed you to learn about something technical like nuclear energy or math. A lot of information on nuclear energy is in English or German. So they had linguistic talents but were chemists, physicists or mathematicians. There was one of the guides who was a mathematician interested in a wider range of things. One day, we got talking

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about the Korean war. I mentioned the U.S. also had had a civil war at one time between the North and the South. He seemed interested and curious, with a wish to know more about it. I suggested that he read *The Red Badge of Courage* to get an idea of some of the feelings of Americans on the front lines during the civil war.

Steven Crane's seminal work was the first time that war as a terrible thing got into the literature. To Crane, it was not a noble cause but an intensely personal experience that called into question many things otherwise assumed. War not as a valiant thing, as it was portrayed in the North very often. The war on a personal level and how much it cost people, the wounded, and the suffering that was brought about by the war. It would also give the Northerners an understanding of how the suffering occurred in the South as well and how much people there suffered because of the war. It wasn't any longer a question of which side you were on, it was a question of the effect of the war that was the same on both sides. So I suggested he get the book. He said he could not get it and asked if I could give him a copy. I promised I would and in fact took a copy with me back to North Korea the next time but unfortunately never had an opportune time to give it to him. I could not put him in the position of accepting it.

USIA had put together 5,000 volumes, each in North Korean style Korean. We had it specially translated and printed in the Philippines, ready in Seoul to go north with me. Each time I would go north, I would take some volumes with me to leave around if I could. I could not leave them in Nyongbyon, because it was against the rules and would have caused trouble for everybody. But I did leave them in Pyongyang with the Swedish representative to give to people who he thought would know about them and understand them and would be able to accept them without causing political difficulties.

I had a long discussion once with one of our guides' bosses in Pyongyang about the American Congress. At that time, Congress was really in an anti-North Korean mood. Part of the reason was that the North Koreans had denied a visa to Rep. Jay Kim who was an ethnic Korean in the U.S. Congress from California and who had applied to visit North

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Korea. He was turned down by the North Koreans as, I guess, a person they did not want to see. My point to them was that not granting a visa was a foolish move, because the very person who they could have counted on to have a better understanding of what went on here was kept out. And that was not a good idea. This very educated, very astute, and relatively speaking, well-read man, had no idea who Jay Kim was. The problem for me as a USIS person was, here was an obvious example where a little knowledge would have helped a very difficult situation.

I think in the U.S. we see the North Koreans as monolithic. That somehow the knowledge that one has, everybody has. In fact, they are very badly divided in terms of being super compartmentalized. I mentioned before the division between the public energy bureau and the foreign ministry. This is true throughout their society. It is true in China. You give something to one man in the Foreign Ministry in Beijing, and the person at the next desk likely will never see it. We ran into this in Beijing, trying to get our Wireless Files into the Foreign Ministry. You would talk to one man, and he would say, "I would like to see those." "Gee, we give them to so-and-so who is in your same section." He says, "That is his copy; I don't see it."

In China, as in most places, information is power. So if you go to a meeting and say, "I know what the Americans said," and the other guy did not, who gets the leg up in the Foreign Ministry? It becomes one of these internal rivalry things. Chinese just do not pass messages around very easily. North Korea is the same way. That means you have to get people who trust you in each of these areas; otherwise you may have the trust of one segment on one side, but two desks over, the bureaucrat thinks you are dirt, because he does not have any idea who you are or what you do.

That is why it was so important for us to have a liaison office in Pyongyang. We can talk until we are blue in the face about our trust and agreements and the fact that the North Koreans did renege on their agreement to cross the border, that is absolutely true. But the fact is, we would have gained far more in the placement of a Liaison Office in Pyongyang

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than North Korea would have gained by the placement of a Liaison Office in Washington. There is be no comparison, because the systems are so dissimilar. It would have been important for them to learn more than it would have been important for them to instruct more. In terms of Pyongyang, the reverse was true. It would be an important learning point for us, but by far it would have been an opening to the society in creating understanding who Americans are and what their intentions are in the world. Now, it is ignorance that dominates things. Gradually, as the North Koreans move around and learn more, this will change, but it will take a lot of patience and time.

A couple of years back, the first North Korean delegation went to Hawaii to CINCPAC to talk about the recovery of remains. That I think was badly mishandled on our side, because we took it as a negotiation instead of what it should have been, an explanation. A similar event had occurred with the Chinese before. I had taken it on as a personal crusade to push that because the Chinese had come to CINCPAC while I was there. Using civilian clothes, military Chinese took a look at our remains identification laboratory, which is called CILHI (Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii), and is located at Travis Air Force Base where all remains from all deceased veterans who are exhumed around the world are brought for DNA testing and whatever positive identification can be made. The North Koreans had a very simplified view of that, as did the Chinese. We brought the Chinese in quietly, no press, no negotiations, but just come as guests and stay in a hotel and be shown what we are doing. We were not asking for any promises or favors. We wanted them to just come and understand.

When that was done with the Chinese, it had marvelous consequences. We got the first American military teams into China to recovery sites in southern China where pilots from Vietnam had crashed. We wanted to investigate those sites and were able to do so in a way that was scientifically sustainable. We could send teams in, working with the Chinese and look at sites at a fair price and exhume the remains where they could be found. We had controlled the situation, so that we had firm assurances for the families back here that those remains were in fact their son, father, uncle, etc. and they could be assured of this

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when they had that casket back home and in the ground. In North Korea, we didn't get any of that, because the North Koreans came as negotiators, not as tourists as it were, and the effort failed. They tried to do it again in New York a couple of weeks ago, and we made, I guess, some little progress, but it hasn't gone very far. Had we gotten off our political stump and just stood down and said, "You come, you look, that is all we are asking," then we probably would have been a lot further down the line in North Korea than we are now.

Q: Who else was going in with the team when you weren't going?

YATES: They were people who were in Seoul with me. The exception was Spence Richardson who only went in once. Since he was the named head of the new Liaison Office, it was felt that having him go more would send the wrong signal. But for those of us worker bees, it was not so important.

Also, they took people out of Washington. The Department of Energy people would go at times. If you had a diplomatic passport, you could go. That was not a very good policy, because that meant people going in didn't have Korean and there were some incidents that happened in North Korea that could have been avoided if they had understood a little more Korean. We had an incident where third country people got involved with some engineer, and we had to expel that engineer from North Korea. We sent him out, not the North Koreans. The North Koreans in their humanistic fashion were very sorry. Subsequent to the expulsion, I got an ear full after I got there. One engineer had a fight with one of the guides. Nobody got hurt, but there were blows exchanged and a lot of irate words. He was immediately sent home. He was a good engineer, a welder. These guys were technicians. He was a good welder, a fabricator from somewhere in North Carolina. Not a bad person. But he was sent home and never went back, and the reason was because he got into a fight with one of the guides.

What had happened was they went to the Diplomatic Club I mentioned earlier and started drinking. There were a bunch of third world people off to the side, Cubans, I am told. They

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began to egg him on. He evidently was having a political discussion with one of the guides, which happened now and then. The guides were drinking also. They never said no to a good cold beer. Nobody was really drunk, but he had a lot. Evidently from the side, these guys were egging him on. "Why are you taking this stuff? I thought you were a strong American." It just built up until he got into a real fight. I guess egos were hurt more than bodies, but we had to send him on the next airplane out and he never came back.

When I went up to Pyongyang later, the North Koreans asked why he was not coming back. They professed to have liked him. They wanted me to understand that they had not asked to have him expelled. They understood that he had done the wrong thing but did not want to see him hurt. They kept saying this again and again until I finally said, "Enough already, I understand, but he is not coming back. You only get one chance in this environment, and we are trying to be careful." We have always tried very carefully to put across to the North Koreans how much we were being super careful about their feelings. That they should let us know when there are any problems, so we could straighten things out. They liked that and took that as a mark of respect.

Another little vignette. We had trouble with the guards coming in and out of the check points. They were surly, mean, and abusive. On my first trip in, I was riding in the back seat with one of the engineers, a deputy who was in charge of the engineering group. He had his feet crossed in the back seat, one foot up on his knee. Going through, he was supposed to be in the back of the car leaning back. We had to wait and wait and wait while these guys went around the car. A guard reached in and slapped his foot off his knee onto the floor. The shocked engineer turned to me, "What did I do?" The reason was clear: the guard took that as a sign of disrespect for authority. He got a dirty look through the window and an admonition not to do that again. And off we went. He was suitably upset about it, but we got him calmed down then.

We then started a series of culture lectures for the engineers on Sundays. I gave a condensed version of Korean 101 on culture. What to do and what not to do. For example,

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when you pass something to someone, you always pass it with the right hand, never use your left hand. The guards always passed back the visas with their left hand, because they were showing us an indication of disrespect or their superior authority. The correct way is to use both hands, but if you can't quite reach, you take one hand and put it under your elbow and pass it with the right hand. That is correct. If you cannot do it that way, you get up and walk around until you can. You never toss things across the table. If you are having a meeting, get up, walk around, and pass things with the right hand, although both hands is the best and most respectful way to do it. Never keep your bags, computers, paraphernalia on the table. Put them on the floor out of sight. Never put your feet on the table. All these little rules were things that were necessary in Korean culture.

We got the engineers starting to do this, particularly with the guards going in and out at the check points. Regardless of how they pass it to you, always pass it back with your right hand. We started doing this. It caused some confusion among the guards going in. First off, it was interesting psychology. If you were doing something polite and somebody did something rude, who is wrong? They know. If you keep doing this, always being polite and nice to them while they are being nasty to you, no longer is it a matter of authority over the barbarians; now they are doing something that they recognize as being culturally correct, but their own actions do not warrant that. When confronted with a biblical turning of the cheek, who is on the defensive?

The guards became confused. The more intelligent or older guards began to be polite, using the right hand to pass things back and forth, too. The older ones, who had been there for a while, began to let people through without stopping. I would get this at lunch time, going back and forth to the house. Very often, they would just wave me through. They became very comfortable with us after a while, because we began to show them a little bit of respect, and they could no longer use the mechanisms of disrespect, because the stupid Americans would not know any better anyway. Now that the Americans did know better, they were now in the wrong in their own cultural terms and that made it very difficult for them to continue the practice. Only the new guards, the ones who did not know

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you, would do the arrogant left-handed affront. A mutual respect began to grow and we had far less trouble. The same was true in the pool area. I taught the engineers enough phrases in Korean like daily greetings, which they would try to use. There would be a great guffaw, because the intrepid Americans from the south always seemed to find a way to mispronounce them. What the linguistic forays did, was to disarm the hard feelings and bring out a relaxed hospitality in the pool area to the point where they began to really work with each other at a much more personal level.

Q: Did the program continue the whole time without basic interruptions during your time there, despite disturbances along the border, etc.?

YATES: Yes, but a qualified yes. The North Koreans did not want the program to stop. It was a small source of income. We were helping them, giving them a lot of equipment and material such as stainless steel canisters. Their point was that they had given everything. They had given up the reactor, and the people in the city of Nyongbyon went cold in the winter, because there was no heat. They did all the sacrificing; we did nothing. There were a lot of things that we did that were wrong. There were mistakes in the negotiations, primarily because of language, but also because we did this at lower levels which were not always the best informed or experienced negotiators.

For example, we had agreed to provide a generator and heat exchanger for the North Koreans, a boiler essentially, so they could make enough hot water to supply the nuclear site, pre-heat the heavy fuel oil to be burned in a converted coal plant so as to put hot water back into the system, and to allow the city to get some heat and heat for the site. We promised a boiler to burn heavy fuel oil in 45 days. The U.S. negotiator, for some reason, thought this was easy. They could just buy one on the west coast and ship it out, and it would be there in two weeks. What he didn't understand is that heavy fuel oil isn't burned in the U.S. anymore. It is an older form of fuel and the only place that we had existing heavy fuel oil burning capability was in the old LSTs that were decommissioned. So we had to find a place where we could get one. It meant we had to buy a design and build it.

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We had the technology, but it was an old technology. Sort of like going to Singer Sewing Machine for a peddle machine. They would build one, but it would be expensive. It took more than a year to get that boiler, a simple teakettle arrangement that could warm heavy oil so that it, in turn, could provide heat for homes in North Korea.

The North Koreans took that as a sign of either disrespect or ignorance or foolishness. We couldn't deliver what we promised. It would come up every morning at a conference before work. The meeting would start and the first thing Chief Engineer Lee would say would be, "Where is the boiler?" He was cold, and his people were cold, and he wanted that boiler there. We brought in kerosine heaters which were all right, but they needed that boiler to provide the hot water heat that was necessary for their living quarters. It wasn't expensive, but it made us look pretty much like fools.

The second thing was how do you get the heavy oil there? The stuff freezes. Heavy oil is like tar. If it gets cold, it gets solid, so that the trucks that were to haul the stuff had to be heated. They wanted a heated truck. We said, "No, no, we only promised you a boiler, we are not going to give you a heated truck." "How are we going to get the fuel from there to here?" They had preheating tanks, called day tanks, where you keep the fuel before you put it into the boiler. They were having trouble with the technology of converting boilers for regular oil to heavy fuel oil. You can't start a boiler with heavy fuel; you have to start it with something else like kerosene in order to get the fire burning, with which you can heat the oil and start the flow and burn the heavy oil. That technology was something they didn't have. Making that conversion was a major stumbling block for them, because we weren't providing it. All we were providing was the heavy fuel oil at the port.

From my point of view, some of the things that we were doing might be called unreasonable. They tried to accommodate us in some things, but in some cases, they could not, and they would start making speeches. They didn't know enough about us to come to us and say "Look, this is our problem and let's see if we can find a solution to this." Their solution was to pound the table and make noise, because they felt that

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was the only way they could negotiate something. Our lack of understanding made these negotiations stretch out far beyond their normal life expectancy. So we did it to ourselves. Not that the North Koreans are wonderful, holy, kind, generous, thrifty; they were nasty at times and would do some terrible things abroad, but their Achilles heel is in the negotiating sense; they are Koreans and their basic instincts are reasonableness, hospitality, but above all intense loyalty to their own system. If we assumed that at the start of the negotiations, we would have saved ourselves a lot of grief.

Q: You ended this particular tour when, in 1996?

YATES: In the fall of 1996.

Q: And then what?

YATES: I came back here to retire.

Q: Maybe we ought to leave it this way. It has been very interesting. Thank you.

YATES: Thank you.

End of interview